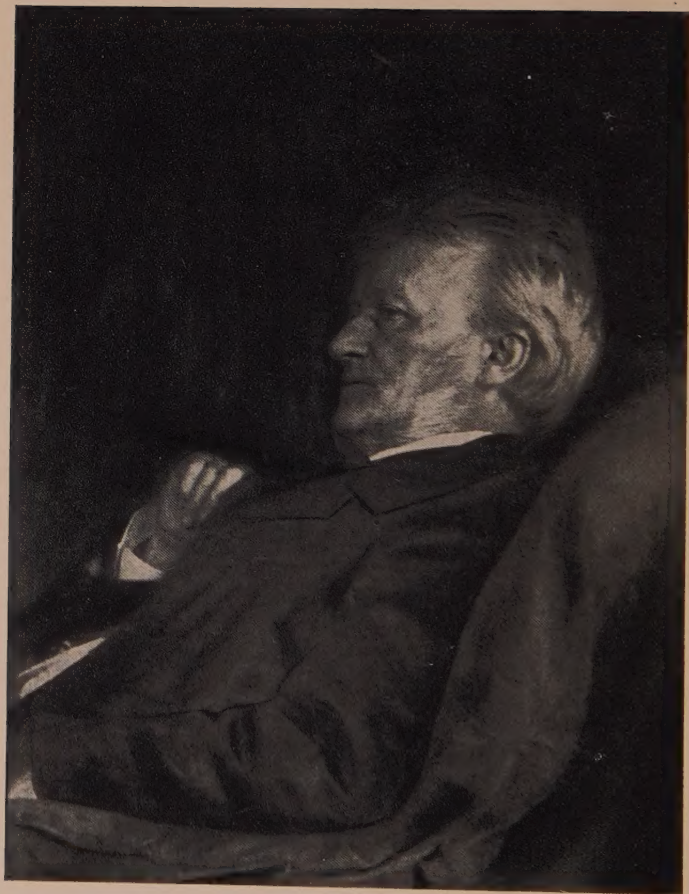


The
WAGNERIAN ROMANCES



GERTRUDE HALL



THE LAST PHOTOGRAPH OF RICHARD WAGNER

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

BY
GERTRUDE HALL

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY, MCMVII
LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD

Copyright, 1907
By JOHN LANE COMPANY

SET UP, ELECTROTYPED AND PRINTED BY
PUBLISHERS PRINTING COMPANY, NEW YORK

To
My Friend

JOHN SANBURN PHILLIPS

this book
is
gratefully dedicated.

INTRODUCTION

THE attempt has been made in the following to give an idea of the charm and interest of the original text of the Wagner operas, of Wagner's extraordinary power and fertility as a dramatist. It is not critique or commentary, it is presentation, picture, narrative; it offers nothing that is not derived directly and exclusively from the Wagner libretti and scores.

The stories of the operas are widely known already, of course. As literature, however, one may almost say they are not known at all, unless by students of German. The translators had before them a task so tremendous, in the necessity to fit their verse-rendering of the master's poetry to extremely difficult music, that we respect them for achieving it at all. None the less must the translations included in our libretti be pronounced painfully inadequate. To give a better, more complete knowledge of the original poems is the object of these essays. The poems form, even apart from the music, a whole beautiful, luminous, romantic world. One would not lose more by dropping out of literature the Idylls of the King than the Wagnerian romances.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PARSIFAL	I
THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG	
THE RHINE-GOLD	35
THE VALKYRIE	69
SIEGFRIED	103
THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS	147
THE MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG	193
TRISTAN AND ISOLDE	263
LOHENGRIN	315
TANNHAEUSER	357
THE FLYING DUTCHMAN	387

PARSIFAL

[1]

PARSIFAL

I

THE story of the Holy Grail and its guardians up to the moment of Parsifal's appearance upon the scene, is—we gather it from Gurnemanz's rehearsal of his memories to the youthful esquires,—as follows: At a time when the pure faith of Christ was in danger from the power and craft of His enemies, there came to its defender, Titurel, angelic messengers of the Saviour's, and gave into his keeping the Chalice from which He had drunk at the Last Supper and into which the blood had been gathered from His wounds as He hung upon the Cross; likewise the Spear with which His side had been pierced. Around these relics Titurel built a temple, and an order of knighthood grew. The temple, Monsalvat, stood upon the Northern slope of mountains overlooking Gothic Spain. No road led to its doors, and those only could find their way to it whom the Holy Spirit guided; and those only could hope to be so guided, and could belong to the brotherhood, who were pure in heart and clean of the sins of the flesh. The knights were mystically fed and strengthened by the vision of the Chalice—which is called the Grail; the duties of the Order were "high deeds of salvation," comprehending warfare upon Christ's enemies, at home and in distant lands.

On the southern slope of the mountain, facing Moorish or heathen Spain, Klingsor had gone into hermitage, in an

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

attempted expiation of evil committed down in the heathen world. What his sin had been, Gurnemanz says, he knows not; but he aspired to become a holy man, he wished to join the brotherhood of the Grail. Finding it impossible to subdue sin in himself by the spirit, he sought, as it were, a mechanical substitute for virtue, by which, however, he failed to attain his object, for his sacrifice called forth from Titurel only contempt, and he was rejected from the Order. He turned all the strength of his rage then to acquiring black arts by which to ruin the detested brotherhood. On the southward mountain-side, he created by sorcery a wonderful pleasure-palace and garden, in which uncannily beautiful women grew. This lay in the path of the knights of the Grail, a temptation and a trap, and one so effectual that he who permitted himself to be lured into it was lost; there had been no exception, safety lay singly in avoidance. Titurel having reached so great an age that he had no longer strength to perform the service of the Grail, invested with the kingly office Amfortas, his son. The latter undertook at once the removal of the standing danger to his knights, the destruction of Klingsor. Armed with the Sacred Spear, he fared forth. . . . Alas! even before the walls of the enchanted castle had been reached, his followers, among whom Gurnemanz, missed him. A woman of dreadful beauty had ensnared him. In her arms he forgot everything, he let the Spear drop from his hand. . . . A great cry, as of one mortally hurt, Gurnemanz relates, was suddenly heard. He rushed to the rescue, and caught sight of Klingsor, laughing as he disappeared carrying the Spear, with which he had wounded Amfortas. And now, possessed of the Spear, it was Klingsor's boast that he should soon be in possession of the Chalice likewise, the Holy Grail itself. And the wound of Amfortas would not heal, and an apprehension was that never

PARSIFAL

could it heal, save at the touch of the Spear which made it. And this, who could conquer it back? Yet the knights were not wholly without hope, for, Amfortas once praying before the despoiled sanctuary, and imploring a sign of pardon, a holy dream-face had appeared to him and delivered the dim but comforting oracle: "Wise through compassion. . . . The immaculate Fool. . . . Await him. . . . My appointed one. . . ."

Thus matters stand when the curtain rises for us upon the forest surrounding the Castle of the Grail. The introductory music is wholly religious, composed principally of the so moving phrase of the Last Communion, the Grail-motif and the Faith-music. The latter opens with what has the effect of a grand declaration, as if it might be understood to say: "I believe in God the Father! I believe in God the Son! I believe in God the Holy Ghost!" and fell to worshipping prayer.

The grey-haired Gurnemanz and two young boys of the Order are discovered sleeping. At the clarion-call from the Castle, they start awake and kneel at their morning devotions. The lake is near where the sick King is carried daily for the bath. Forerunners of his cortège pass, and are questioned by Gurnemanz concerning his condition. No, the healing herb, obtained at such price of courage and cunning, has not helped him. (For, though their drugs prove still and ever useless, the devoted followers will not give up the search for earthly relief.) This discouraged answer is hardly given, when another appears who has been ranging afar in search of a remedy—Kundry, arriving like the whirlwind, on a mare that staggers reaching the goal. Spent with speed, the strange wild woman totters to Gurnemanz and presses on him a crystal phial: Balsam! If this does not help, Arabia holds nothing more from which

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

health can be hoped! Felled by fatigue, she drops on the ground, refusing any further speech. When the king is now brought in upon a litter and halts on his way to the lake for a moment's rest, receiving from Gurnemanz the balsam, he thanks the woman, as one who has often before done him such service. She rejects his thanks roughly, as if almost they hurt: "No thanks! No thanks! What good will it do? Away! Away! To the bath!"

The young esquires, lingering after the king has been borne onward, eye her as she lies on the ground like a wild beast, and voice their suspicion of her, founded, after the fashion of youth's judgements, upon her looks. They believe those potions of hers will finally destroy the king altogether. Gurnemanz checks them, reminding them heatedly of her services, beyond all that any other could perform. "Who, when we are at loss how to send tidings to brethren warring in distant lands, we scarcely even know where,—who, before we have come to any resolve, flies to them and returns, having acquitted herself of the task aptly and faithfully? . . ." "But," they object, "she hates us! See how malignantly she glowers at us! She is a heathen, a sorceress!" "One she may be, perhaps, labouring under a curse," Gurnemanz goes thus far with them; "she lives here, it may be, a penitent, to expiate some unforgiven sin of her earlier life." He tells how, so long ago as at the time of the building of the temple, Titurel first found her among the tangled growth of the forest, rigid in death-like sleep. "I myself," he continues, "discovered her but recently in the like condition. It was soon after the calamity had befallen, brought upon us by the evil one over the mountain." And turning to Kundry, as if the thought had but just occurred: "Hey! Tell me, you! Where were you roaming when our master lost the Spear?" The woman gazes gloom-

PARSIFAL

ily, and preserves a silence which we afterwards see to be significant. "Why did you not help us at that time?" "I never help!" she exclaims darkly, and turns away. "If she is as faithful as you say, and as daring, and full of resource," suggests ironically one of the young esquires, "why not send her after the lost Spear?" "That!" Gurnemanz replies sadly, "is another matter. That nobody can achieve!" And, the memory of the past rising strong within him, he relates to the questioning young fellows, new in the brotherhood and ignorant of its history, the events set down in their order a little way back. He has repeated to them the mysterious promise of help: "Wise through compassion. . . . The immaculate Fool. . . . Await him. . . . My appointed one. . . ." And they, impressed, are saying it after him, when, at the words "*Der reine Thor*," the pure—the clean-lived—the immaculate Fool, a commotion develops in the direction of the lake-side, cries of "Woe! A pity! A shame! Who did it?" A great wild swan flies in sight, sinks to earth hurt to death by an arrow, and the king's esquires bring in, chiding and accusing him, a tall, innocent-eyed, fresh-cheeked boy, armed with bow and arrows,—Parsifal. Rustic enough is his outfit, but his bearing unmistakably that of the high-born, as Gurnemanz does not fail to remark. A sturdy, brave, gay-hearted strain has ushered him in, and for just a moment he stands quite like a brother of Siegfried's, fearless, unconscious of himself, as ignorant of the world as he is unspotted by it, but engagingly wide-awake, serene in watching its mysterious actions. "Are you the one who killed the swan?" Gurnemanz asks him sternly. And he answers, unabashed, quite as Siegfried might have done: "Certainly! Whatever flies I shoot on the wing!" But at once after this the difference between the two is manifest. To both whole regions of emotion are unknown,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

but certain emotions which are outside the nature of one, are potentially the very strongest in the other. Siegfried is not pitiful. The strong, radiant being is incomplete on that side, so that the Christian heart winces a little, here and there, at the bright resoluteness with which he pursues his course when it involves, for instance, death to the little foster-father, unrighteous imp though he be, or horror to Brünnhilde, captured by violence and offered to his friend. Whereas Parsifal, when Gurnemanz now makes plain to him the cruelty of his thoughtless action, when he points out the glazing eye, the blood dabbling the snowy plumage of the noble swan, faithful familiar of the lake, killed as he circled in quest of his mate, is seized with a passion of realizing pity, impulsively breaks and flings from him his bow, and hides his eyes from the work of his hands. "How—how could you commit such a wrong?" Gurnemanz pursues unrelenting, even after these expressions of contrition. "I did not know," Parsifal answers. Then to the amazement of all are revealed the most extravagant ignorance and simplicity ever met. "Where do you come from?" "I do not know." "Who is your father?" "I do not know." "Who directed you here?" "I do not know." "What is your name?" "I have had many, but no longer remember any of them." "Truly," grumbles Gurnemanz, "I have so far never in my life met with any one so stupid—except Kundry." Very sagely, he leaves off questioning the fool; but when the others, after reverently taking up the dead swan, have departed with it for burial, he addresses him: "Of all I have asked you, you know nothing. Now tell me what you do know! For it can hardly be but that you know something." Whereupon very simply and obediently the boy begins: "I have a mother. Her name is Herzeleide. (Heart's-sorrow.) We lived in the woods and on the wild moor. . . ." And it

PARSIFAL

appears from his own ingenuous narrative and the additions of Kundry, who in her rangings has seemingly had opportunities to watch him, that he is the son of the hero Gamuret, slain in battle before his birth, and that, in terror of a like early death for him, his mother has reared him in solitude, far from arms and reports of war, in absolute ignorance of the world. One day, he tells in joyous excitement, bright-gleaming men passed along the forest's edge, seated upon splendid animals; his instant wish was to be like them, but they laughed and galloped away. He ran after them, but could not overtake them. Up hill and down dale he travelled, for days and nights. With his bow he was compelled to defend himself against wild beasts and huge men. . . . "Yes!" throws in Kundry eagerly, as if at the recollection of splendid fights witnessed, "he made his strength felt upon miscreants and giants. They were all afraid of the truculent boy!" He turns upon her a vaguely pleased wonder: "Who is afraid of me? . . . Tell me!" "The wicked!" He seems trying to grasp a wholly new idea presented to him. "Those who threatened me were wicked? Who is good?" Gurnemanz in reply reminds him of his mother, who is good, and from whom he has run away; she no doubt is seeking him in sorrow. Kundry brusquely interrupts: "Her sorrow is ended. His mother is dead!" And, at his incredulous cry of horror: "I was riding past and saw her die. She bade me take to you, fool, her last blessing." Parsifal springs upon this bearer of evil tidings with the instinctive attempt to shut off the breath that could frame such terrible words. Gurnemanz forcibly disengages her, and, overpowered by the shock and weight of his pain, Parsifal sinks in a swoon. Tenderly at once both servants of the Grail care for him. Kundry hastens for water with which to wet his temples, and, as he revives, offers him drink. Gurnemanz is struck by

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

the magnanimity of her action. "That is right," he nods his approval, "that is in accordance with the gracious spirit of the Grail. We banish evil when we return good for it." Kundry turns sadly away: "I never do good! . . . All I desire is rest! . . . Rest!" And while Gurnemanz is still occupied with restoring Parsifal, she slowly walks, as if powerfully drawn and intensely resisting, toward a tangled copse. She appears struggling with inexpressible weariness; the music gives a hint of something unnatural and evil in the spell of sleep falling leadenly upon her, expressing at the same time an irresistible element in it of attraction. The dark, wild-haired messenger of the Grail, the despised subordinate, suddenly assumes to our sense a much greater importance than up to this moment. Her personality looms large with an unexplained effect of tragedy. "Only rest! Rest for the weary one!" she murmurs yearningly; "sleep! Oh, let nobody wake me!" Terror checks her for a moment: "No! No! I must not sleep!" she shudders, "I am afraid!" She falls to violent trembling. But whatever it is compelling her is too strong at last. Her arms fall unnerved, her head bows languidly, and she moves feebly whither she is drawn. "Useless resistance! . . . The hour is come. Sleep. . . . Sleep. . . . I must!" Having reached the thicket she drops on the earth among the bushes.

The sun is now high, the king is borne homeward from the bath. The thought has struck Gurnemanz that here under his hands is surely as exquisite a *Thor* as could well be, and the experiment suggests itself of taking him to the temple, where, as he tells him, if he be pure, the Grail will be to him meat and drink. He places the arm of the still strengthless youth about his neck, and gently upholds him as they start on their way. "Who is the Grail?" asks Parsifal, as they walk. "That may not be put into words," replies Gurnemanz, "but, if you are of

PARSIFAL

the chosen, you cannot fail to learn. And, see now! I believe I know who you are. No road leads through the land to the Grail, and no one could find the way except Itself guided him. . . ." "I am scarcely moving," says the wondering boy, "yet it seems to me we have already gone a long way. . . ."

And, indeed, the forest has been miraculously gliding past. It ends before a granite wall in which a great portal stands open. This gives entrance into ascending rocky galleries; sounds of clarions come stealing to the ear; church-bells are heard—and we are presently translated into the interior of the Castle of the Grail, the great domed hall.

Parsifal entering with Gurnemanz stops still beside the threshold, spell-bound in presence of all the lofty beauty. "Now watch with attention," his guide instructs him, before leaving him where he stands, "and let us see, if you are a simple soul and pure, what light shall be vouchsafed you."

The scene now enacting itself before him is well calculated to strike the imagination of the boy from the lonely moors. The knights of the Grail, beautiful in their clear robes, enter in procession, chanting. When they cease, the singing is taken up by younger voices, of personages unseen up in the dome, and, after them, by children's voices from the airy summit of the dome, floating, angelic. The wounded king is brought in on his litter, and laid upon the high canopied seat before the altar, upon which the shrine is placed enclosing the Grail. The knights have ranged themselves along tables prepared with silver goblets. In the silence of recollection which falls upon all, a voice is heard, as if from the grave: "My son Amfortas, are you at your post?" It is the aged Titurel, whose resting-place is a recess behind the altar and the raised seat. There he is kept alive solely by the contemplation of the Grail, mystical means of life and strength. "Are you at

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

your post? Shall I look upon the Grail once more and live?" But long-gathering despair to-day reaches its climax in Amfortas, at the necessity to perform the rite required. The torture to him cannot be measured of the vision which creates ecstasy in the others. "Woeful inheritance fallen to me!" he complains, in his passion of revolt against this divine infiction, "that I, the only sinner among all, should be condemned to be keeper of holiest holies, and call down blessings upon those purer than I!" But the worst of his anguish is still that when the holy blood glows in the Cup, and, in sympathy, the blood gushes forth anew from the wound in his side—the wound made by the same Spear—the consciousness ever returns to burning life that, whereas those holy drops were shed in a heavenly compassion for the misery of man, these are unregenerate blood, hot with sinful human passion and longing, which no chastening has availed to drive out. The wretched king is praying for the mercy of deliverance through death, when, from the high dome, the words rain softly of the promise of redemption—through the Fool. Recovering courage, Amfortas proceeds with the rite. While he kneels in prayer before the Chalice, which young acolytes have taken from the shrine and reverently uncovered, a mysterious darkness gathers over all. A ray of light suddenly falls through this, upon the Chalice, which begins softly to glow, and brightens to a deep luminous purple-red. Amfortas lifts it and waves it over the kneeling people. The words of the Last Communion are heard, sung by the soaring voices in the dome: "Take my body—Take my blood—For the sake of our love! Take my blood—Take my body—And remember me!"

The ceremony accomplished, Amfortas sets down the Cup, which begins to pale; as it fades, the twilight lightens. When

PARSIFAL

the common light of day has completely returned, the knights sit down to the repast of consecrated Bread placed for them, and Wine poured, by the acolytes. At the end of it, they earnestly grasp one another's hands in renewal of their bond of brotherhood.

Amfortas is perceived to be suffering from the renewed bleeding of his wound. He is laid upon the litter once more and borne away. The knights depart in orderly procession, the hall is gradually deserted.

Parsifal remains standing on the same spot. He has hardly moved, except, when Amfortas's anguished cry rang out, to clutch at his heart. Gurnemanz, when he sat down at the table with the other knights, signed to him to come and share in the holy feast, but he did not stir. The impression can be apprehended of the solemn scene upon the white page of the boy's mind. A spirit of religion has breathed through it all, so exalted, so warm, so personal; the passionate mediæval Christianity which expressed itself in crusades and religious orders and knight-errantry. The cry of the Saviour (*Erlösung's Held*, Hero of Redemption, the poet characteristically calls him) has rung so piercingly, there seems but one answer from a humanly constituted simple heart: "Did you indeed suffer so much and die for love of me and my brothers? How then can I the most quickly spend and scatter all my strength and blood in gratitude to you?" Parsifal has brought to these things a consciousness not blurred and overscored by worldly knowledge and desires, a native capacity for love of others uninterfered with by the developed consideration of self. His fresh instinct has gathered the meaning of what he sees, novel to him as it is; "wise through compassion," he has gotten the measure and character perfectly of Amfortas's sufferings, foreign as they are to his experience; he has gotten the spirit of

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

the facts of Christ. One especial message, over and above the rest, he has received to himself, shot into his heart upon a ray from the glowing Grail held before his gaze by Amfortas: that the Saviour embodied in the Grail must be delivered from the sin-sullied hands now holding it. He has seemed to hear the appeal of the Saviour, poignant, to be so delivered. He is left, when the vision fades, with the sense of this necessity—involving for himself, though he knows not how, a duty and a quest: Amfortas must be healed, the Sacred Treasure must be taken into keeping by purer hands.

Gurnemanz approaches him hopefully: "Well, did you understand what you saw?" But Parsifal, still in his trance of wonder, only shakes his head. It is too deep for words, what he has felt.

To Gurnemanz he now seems a hopeless and unprofitable fool, who has no place in the noble company. "You are a fool, it is a fact, and you are nothing else!" he declares. Opening a side-door, he without further ceremony pushes him out by the shoulders, with a sour little joke: "Take my advice: Let the swans alone hereafter, and, gander that you are, find yourself a goose!" As he turns from the door, there falls from above, as if some echo of it had clung to the high dome after all the singers had left, the strain: "Wise through compassion. . . . The immaculate fool. . . ."

II

The next change of scene shows the interior of the tower where Klingsor practises his dark arts. A strain already known catches our attention (the Sorcery-motif), and we become aware what influences were at work in Kundry when her weariness succumbed to the lure of sleep, what mesmeric

PARSIFAL

call from Klingsor's hotly blooming, godless pleasure-seat. The Klingsor-music introducing the second act stands in picturesque contrast to the tender and thoughtful music opening the first; curiously suggesting, as it does, lawlessness, cold evil passions riding the soul hideously at a gallop. It has something vaguely in common with portions of the Venus-music in Tannhäuser,—perhaps its effect at once unbridled and joyless.

The sorcerer has from the battlements seen Parsifal approaching, who, thrust out from the Castle of the Grail, had, by the peculiar magic of the place, found the path to it obliterated. He had come forth with the exalted but undefined sense of a great task to perform. But, even as the road to the Castle of the Grail was difficult to find, the road to Klingsor's castle was easy and overeasiness; it would seem that for the feet of a votary of the Grail all roads led to it. Parsifal had seen it shining afar, and with childish shouts of delight is drawing near. Klingsor, divining in him an enemy more than usual dangerous, resorts, to make his ruin altogether sure, to what are his supreme methods. He calls to his assistance once more the ally by whose help the great Amfortas had been vanquished. With mysterious passes and burning of gums, he summons that Formidable Feminine: "Nameless one! . . . Most ancient of Devils! . . . Rose of Hell! . . . Herodias! . . ." and amid the blue smoke-wreathes, uttering the wail of a slave haled to the market-place, rises the form of Kundry. She appears like one but half roused from the torpor of sleep, and struggling with a terrible dream, or resisting some terrible reality. All the answer she can give to his first words of ironical congratulation, is in broken exclamations: "Oh! Oh! Deep night. . . . Madness. . . . Oh, wrath! Oh, misery! . . . Sleep! Sleep! Deep sleep! . . . Death! . . ." and, in a

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

subsequent outburst: "The curse! . . . Oh, yearning! . . . Yearning! . . ."

Her history and hints of her extraordinarily complex personality are to be gathered from the scene following and the scene later, with Parsifal. The mysterious messenger of the Grail was anciently Herodias, and meeting with the Man of Sorrows, she laughed. "Then," she herself relates, "He turned His eyes upon me. . . ." Under the curse involved in her action and the remorse generated by that divine look, she cannot die, but goes, as she describes it, seeking Him from world to world, to meet His eyes again. She tries in every manner to expiate her sin, by service to others, by subjugation of self, but the old nature is still not well out of her, the nature of Herodias, and, at intervals, an infinite weariness of well-doing overtakes her, a revival of the passions of her old life, and with the cessation of struggle against them she falls into a death-like sleep. In this condition, as if it represented a laying-off of the armour of righteousness, her spirit is at the mercy of the powers of evil. The necromancer Klingsor can conjure it up and force it to his own uses.

In the centuries she has lived, she has borne many names. She has but recently been the temptress of Amfortas, and at the reassumption of the higher half of her dual nature, has, as the servant and messenger of the Grail, striven to make amends, as far as she might, for the mischief done by her in her other state. The curse under which she lives has peculiar laws of its own, of which we just vaguely feel the moral basis. In her character of temptress, while desiring with intensity, in her Herodias part, the surrender of the man to whose seduction she applies herself, yet with the other side of her, the side of the penitent, which never quite slumbers, she even more ardently and fundamentally desires his victory over her arts, for, with

PARSIFAL

her own frustration, she would be delivered from her curse, she could die; from the enormous fatigue of centuries of tormented earthly existence, find rest. Which is to say, perhaps, that if once more she could meet and look into the eyes of complete strength and purity, see an adequate approach to the Christ-spirit shining out of whatsoever eyes, her redemption, so painfully worked toward through centuries of alternate effort and relapse, would be consummated; at that encounter, renewing, or confirming, faith in the existence of perfect goodness, the evil within her, so long vainly fought, would die, and her long trial be at end. So she approaches every new adventure with, under her determined wiles, the hope of failure; and when her subject is still and ever found weak in her hands, experiences despair. And when a hero such as Amfortas, undertaken with the undercurrent sense that he perhaps is the unconquerable, whose resistance shall make him her deliverer, vulgarly falls in her arms, the triumph of one side of her nature, and the despair of the other, express themselves in terrible laughter. The fruit of her experience with man is, as it affects the two sides of her, a mixture of sinister cynicism and ineffable pity. "Woe! Woe!" she laments, at Klingsor's mocking mention of Amfortas. "Weak, he too! Weak—all of them! Through me, to my curse, all lost as I am lost! Oh, eternal sleep, only balm, how, how shall I win you?"

One can suppose in this Kundry, setting aside all details of personal history, an intended personification of the abstraction—(*Namenlose*,—Nameless One,) Eternal Feminine, with, set in the high light, two of her broad traits, the best perhaps and the worst: the passion for serving, tending, protecting, mothering, and the passion for subduing man, proving herself more powerful than the stronger, by remorseless practice upon his point of least strength. This inveterate spirit of

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

seduction it must be which Klingsor apostrophises as "Most Ancient of Devils," and "Rose of Hell."

The character of Kundry has many aspects, exhibited here and there by a flash, but, when all is said, and before all else, what we are watching is an upward-struggling human soul, whose storm-beaten progress could never move us as it does did we not feel in her simply our sister.

We saw her, forspent, crawl into the thicket to sleep. Now, Klingsor who can command her while in that state, has compelled her to him to accomplish the undoing of Parsifal. The idea is to her, all heavy and clogged with sleep, the personality of the *Gralsbotin* still in the ascendant, one of horror only. With wails of protest at having been waked, and lamentation over what is proposed, she refuses to obey, rejecting Klingsor's claim to be her master. Even when he puts his request in the form of the suggestion: "He who should defy you would set you free. Try it then with the boy at hand!" she stubbornly refuses. "He is even now climbing the rampart!" Klingsor persists. Kundry wrings her hands. "Woe! Woe! Have I waked for this? Must I, indeed? . . . Must I?" At which first intimation of weakening, Klingsor ceases to press his authority, and adopts a different method of persuasion. Climbing to the battlement, he describes the approaching figure: "Ha! He is beautiful, the boy!" "Oh! Oh!" moans Kundry, "woe is me!"

Klingsor blows his horn, to warn the garrison of the palace—the host of the victims of folly, the lost knights—of the approaching enemy. A commotion is heard of arms caught up in haste and of fighting; Klingsor from his post follows the contest, with glee in the daring of the beautiful boy, who has snatched the sword from one of his assailants and with it, one against the swarm, is cutting his way through them. Kundry,

PARSIFAL

ceasing from her moans, has begun to laugh, and as Klingsor continues his report of the skirmish laughs more and more uncontrollably. "They yield, they flee, each of them carries home his wound! Ha! How proudly he stands upon the rampart! How the roses bloom and smile in his cheeks, as, in childlike amazement, he gazes down upon the solitary garden! . . . Hey! Kundry!" But with her laughter ending in a scream, Kundry has abruptly vanished. "What? Already at work?" muses Klingsor. "Ha ha! I knew the charm which will always bring you back into my service!" Then turning his attention once more to the youthful intruder filling his eyes with the unimagined glories of the garden: "You there, fledgling! Whatever prophecy may have had to say concerning you, too young and green you have fallen into my power. Purity wrested from you, you will become my willing subject!"

The tower, with Klingsor, vanishes from sight; there lies outspread before us the enchanted garden, glowing, tropical, displaying the last luxuriance of flowers; and we see for ourselves Parsifal standing upon the wall, calmly gazing. A swarm of beautiful young creatures, waked by the clash of arms have, even as their lovers turned and fled to cover, rushed forth to discover what is the matter. With confused cries they pour from the palace and, recognising in Parsifal the whole of the enemy, assail him with abuse scarcely more unendurable than a pelting with thorny rose-buds. "You there! You there! Why did you do us this injury? A curse upon you! A curse upon you!" As Parsifal undismayed leaps down into the garden, they fall to twittering like angry sparrows: "Ha! You bold thing! Do you dare to brave us? Why did you beat our beloved?" And the raw boy, acquitting himself rather neatly for such a beginner: "Ought I not to have beaten them? They were barring my passage to you!" "You

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

wanted to come to us? Had you ever seen us before?" "Never had I seen anything so pretty. I speak rightly, do I not, in calling you lovely?" A rapid change takes place in the attitude toward him of the exceedingly pretty persons. They adorn themselves in haste, fantastically, to charm him, with the flowers of the garden; singing a wooing song, of the most melting, persuasive, irresistible, they weave around him, circling as in a child's game of ring-a-rosy, sweeping the heady perfumes of their garlands under his nostrils. They do not appear wholly human, but rather like strange tall-stemmed animated flowers, swaying and jostling in the wind, and whose odor should have turned into music; or, better still, like incarnate emanations from the intoxicating flower-beds of this magical Garden of the Senses. Parsifal stands in their midst, pleased and watchful, fleetingly again like Siegfried, with his cheerful calm and poise. "How sweet you smell! . . . Are you flowers?" They close around him more and more smotheringly, with caresses more and more pressing. He gently pushes them away. "You wild, lovely, crowding flowers! If I am to play with you, let me have room!" As they do not obey, and in addition fall to quarrelling among themselves over him, half-vexed, he repels them and is turning for retreat, when a voice is heard from a blossoming thicket near-by: "Parsifal! Stay! . . ." The flowers, startled, at once hold still. The youth stands still, too, struck. *Parsifal*. . . . He remembers that as one of the names his mother had called him by, once, as she lay asleep and dreaming. The voice continues: "Here remain, Parsifal. . . . You simple light-o'-loves, depart from him. Early withering flowers, he is destined to other things than dalliance with you!" The flock of flowers, reluctantly, lingering as long as they dare, withdraw, their last word one of derision: "You beautiful one! You proud one! You . . .

PARSIFAL

fool!" With whispered laughter they vanish into the house, and Parsifal, in the once more solitary garden, asks himself: "Was it all a dream?"

For the first time touched with timidity, he turns towards the blossoming bower from which the voice had come. The branches part, and reveal Kundry, youthful, gorgeously apparelled and superlatively beautiful, lying upon a flowery bank. "Did you mean the name you spoke for me, who have no name?" Parsifal asks, standing shyly apart.

"I called you, guileless Innocent, Parsifal. . . . By this name your father Gamuret, expiring in Arabian land, called his unborn son. I have sought you here to tell you this. . . ."

"Never had I seen," sighs Parsifal, "never dreamed, such a thing as I now see and am filled with awe! . . . Are you, too, a flower in this garden of flowers?" "No, Parsifal. Far, far away is my home. I came here only that you might find me. I came from distant lands where I witnessed many things. . . ." With the calm notes of the Arch-enchantress, perfectly sure of her power, she unfolds to him the story of his own past further back than he can remember, which is of the things she professes to have ocularly witnessed,—his life with Herzeleide; she relates the death of the latter from grief over his loss. She takes him in hand with easy masterliness in the art of reducing a youthful heart. She does not stint to appear to one so boyish much older and very wise. Not one discomposing word does she utter about love,—but she brings his heart to a state of fusion by the picture of his mother's sorrowful end, and when, overcome by anguish and remorse, he sinks at her feet with the cry: "What have I done? . . . Sweetest, loveliest mother! Your son, your son must bring about your death! . . ." she gently places her arm about his

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

neck and administers needed comfort: "Never before had you known sorrow, and so have not known either the sweetness of consolation. Let sorrow and regret be washed away in the consolation proffered to you by Love!" But Parsifal, the compassionate, cannot so soon be diverted from the rending thought of his mother, and continues despite the fair arm on his neck and the balmy breath in his hair, with his passionate self-reproach: "My mother! I could forget my mother! Ha! What else have I forgotten? What, indeed, have I ever remembered? Naught but utter folly dwells in me!" Kundry again attempts setting him right with himself and offers the cheer: "Acknowledgment of your fault will place a term to remorse. Consciousness of folly will turn folly into sense. . . ." Then, not quite relevantly, "Learn to know the love which enfolded Gamuret when Herzeleide's affection burningly overflowed, . . ." With the assurance that she who gave him life now sends him as a mother's last blessing the First Kiss of Love, she bends over him and places her lips upon his in a prolonged Wagnerian kiss. The sorcery-motif is heard weaving its unholy snare. Of a sudden, with an abruptness as unexpected as it is disconcerting, Parsifal tears himself from her embrace, leaps to his feet, and pressing his hands to his heart, as if there were the seat of an intolerable pain, "Amfortas!" he cries, staring like one who sees ghosts, "the wound! the wound! . . ." That has been the effect of her kiss upon his innocence, to give him sudden clairvoyance into her nature, to cast a lightning flash upon the past. He feels himself for a moment identified with Amfortas, whom the woman had kissed as she kissed him. Amfortas's wound burns in his own side. Not only that: the sinful, disorderly, unsubduable passion torturing Amfortas, for a moment tortures equally Parsifal,

PARSIFAL

whose nature is thrown by it into a horror of self-hatred, and casts itself upon frenzied prayer for deliverance and pardon. Pardon, for although this experience can be thought an effect of mysterious insight, Parsifal recognises as a crime that he should be in these circumstances at all. He remembers that he had known himself as one marked for a sacred mission. He remembers the vision of the Grail, and that the Saviour had seemed to speak from it to his inmost soul: "Deliver me! Save me from sin-polluted hands!" "And I," he groans, "the fool! the coward! I could rush to the insensate exploits of a boy!"

Kundry has been amazed and somewhat alarmed, but for a moment still, as it appears, has not understood. She leaves her flowery couch and approaches Parsifal, where he is kneeling in supplication to the Lord of Mercy; with soft arts she attempts to reconquer his attention, but with an effect wide of her expectation, for, while she plies him with caresses, he is thinking, and we hear him think: "Yes, that voice, even thus it fell upon his ear. . . . And that glance, I recognise it clearly, which smiled away his peace. . . . So the lip trembled for him. . . . So the throat arched. . . . So the tresses laughingly gleamed! . . . So the soft cheek pressed close against his own, . . . and so, in league with all the sorrows, so her mouth kissed away his soul's salvation!" As if the reinforcements from Heaven, which he prayed, had suddenly reached him, he rises in inspired strength, frees himself and thrusts her resolutely from him: "Destroyer, away from me! Forever and ever away!"

From this onward he is a different Parsifal, not in the least a boy any more. It is as if in the storm which swept him he had found himself, his anchorage and his strength. And now we gather that Kundry really has had an inkling of what is at

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

work in him. She drops at once the fairly simple methods she has up to this used, and, it is not quite clear at first whether still as a mighty Huntress, discarding one weapon and taking another better adapted to bring down the quarry, or at last in true earnest, she invokes—pressing, not to be denied—his pity. She reveals—and it is as if beauty and splendour should lift the veil from a hidden ulcer—her strange history, the ancient sin, the curse upon her, the despair that is denied tears and can only voice itself in laughter. “Since your heart is capable only of feeling the sorrows of others,” she pleads, “feel mine!” In him, as he has become within the hour, she recognises a deliverer, but, illogically, thirsts the more for his love. From this figure with the firm, compassionate eyes and the exalted self-possession, something breathes which associates him to her sense with the figure, sought by her through the centuries, of the derided Victim. She feels herself face to face once more with the Christ-spirit. But the blind desire of her dual personality is that pardon should wear the form of love. Parsifal, with every moment more firmly established in his strength and purpose, replies to her madness with a calm homily,—his theme, how from the springs of passion flow waters of thirst. Words of wisdom, eternal truths, drop from the so young lips of the fool. Kundry, who has listened in wonder, exclaims: “So it was my kiss which gave you universal vision! The full cup of my love then would make you to a god!” and coming back eagerly to her point: “Deliver the world, if such is your mission. If an hour can make you to a god, let me, for that hour, suffer damnation. . . .” “For you, too, sinner, I will find salvation,” is Parsifal’s mild reply. “Let me love you in your godlikeness, that shall be salvation for me!” “Love and salvation both shall reward you, if you will show me the way to Amfortas!”

PARSIFAL

It will have been remarked that Kundry in her singular rôle has been playing fair; that, though life for her (which paradoxically is death) depends upon failure, she has put forth her whole strength in the temptation. But it is not at this juncture the penitent who is in the ascendant, it is the evil side of Kundry, and at that last request of Parsifal's, proving the vanity of her effort, a great anger seizes her: "Never!" she cries, "never shall you find him! The fallen king, let him perish! The wretch whom I laughed and laughed and laughed at! Ha ha! Why—he was wounded with his own spear. . . . And against yourself," she follows this, "I will call to aid that weapon, if you give that sinner the honour of your pity!" But, at the sound of her own words, her anger dropping: "Ah, madness! . . . Pity! On me, do you have pity! One single hour mine . . . and you shall be shown on your way!" With a renewal of tenderness she attempts to clasp him; but at his abhorrent, "Unhappy woman, away!" furious beside all bounds, she falls to shouting for help against him, help to prevent his going. "Help! Here! Hold the audacious one! Bar the roads against him! Bar the paths! . . ." Then, addressing him in the blaze of her revengeful wrath: "And though you should escape from here—and though you should find all the roads in the world, the road which you seek you shall not find! For all roads and paths which lead you away from me, I place a curse upon them. Hopelessly—hopelessly shall you wander and stray! . . ."

At her wild summoning the women have come running into the garden; Klingsor has appeared on the threshold, armed with the Spear. This, with the words: "The Fool shall be transfixed with his Master's Spear!" he hurls at Parsifal. But the Spear stands miraculously poised above the youth's head. He grasps it, with a face of ecstasy, and draws in the air a great

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

figure of the Cross. "By this sign I dispel your sorceries! As this Spear shall close the wound it made, let this lying splendour fall to wreck and desolation!" As if shaken by an earthquake, the palace crumbles to ruin; the garden withers away and turns to a barren waste; like broken and wilted flowers the women are seen bestrewing the ground; Kundry falls to earth with a great cry. And Parsifal, departing, turns on the ruined wall for a last word to her,—painfully she lifts her head for a last look—"You know where, only, you may see me again!" meaning, we are left to feel, a plane sooner than a place.

III

Again the Domain of the Grail, where, on the outskirts of the forest, beside a spring, the old-grown Gurnemanz has built himself a hermit's cell. It is long after and much is changed. There is sadness in the air, but it is of an unfretful gentle sort, almost sweet; the sadness of a solitude visited by high thoughts, memories of calamity softened in retrospect, present crosses made supportable by faith and the light cast on the path already of an approaching event which is to mark a new epoch in the life of the Order. A sadness in the air and a something holy. It is Spring-time and it is Good-Friday; the trees are in blossom and the meadow at the forest's edge is spotted with new flowers. We are never, through the first part of the act, left unconscious for long of the sweetness of surrounding nature and the hour; it comes like whiffs of perfume, every now and then, reminding us that the earth has renewed herself and the day is holy, until at last these stray intimations have led to a clear and rounded statement in the Good-Friday Charm.

Forth from his cell comes Gurnemanz, to be recognized as a

PARSIFAL

knight of the Grail only by the straight under-tunic of the Order. He has heard a groan, not to be mistaken for the cry of a hurt animal. As it is repeated, it strikes his ear as a sound known to him of old. Anxiously searching among the matted thorn-trees, he discovers Kundry, as once before, rigid and to all appearance dead. He chafes and calls and brings her back to consciousness. She is the Kundry of the first act, but so changed,—pale with the strained pallor of one lately exorcised; the wildness and roughness all gone out of her face, and in its place a strange rapt fixity; in her bearing an unknown humility. In silence she recovers remembrance of the facts of her existence; mechanically orders her hair and garments, and without a word leaves Gurnemanz to set about the work of a servant. As she is moving towards the hut, he asks: "Have you no word for me? Is this my thanks for having waked you once more out of the sleep of death?" And she brings forth brokenly the last words she is heard to utter: "To serve! . . . To serve! . . ." the only need now of her being. "How different her bearing is," Gurnemanz muses, "from what it used to be! Is it the influence of the holy day?" She brings from the cell a water-jar, and, gazing off into the distance while it fills, sees among the trees some one approaching, to which, by a sign, she calls Gurnemanz's attention. He marvels at the figure in sable armour; but we, saddened and slowed as it is, have recognized the Parsifal-motif heralding it. The sable knight is faring slowly on his way, with closed helmet, bowed head and lowered spear, unconscious of his observers, until, when he drops on a grassy knoll to rest, Gurnemanz greets and addresses him: "Have you lost your way? Shall I guide you?" Receiving no answer to this or the questions which follow, save by signs of the head, he with the bluntness we remember offers a reprimand: "If your vow binds you not to speak to

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

me, my vow obliges me to tell you what is befitting. You are upon a consecrated spot, it is improper here to go in armour, with closed helmet, with shield and spear. And of all days upon this one! Do you not know what holy day it is?" The knight gently shakes his head. "Among what heathen have you lived, not to be aware that this is the most holy Good-Friday? Lay down, forthwith, your arms! Do not offend the Lord, who on this day, unarmed in very truth, offered His sacred blood in atonement for the sins of the world!" The knight upon this, still without a word, drives the haft of his spear into the ground, lays down his arms and sinks upon his knees in prayer before the Spear. The removal of his helmet has revealed the face of Parsifal, but another Parsifal, even as Kundry is another. The stage-directions have no word concerning it, but it must be in accordance with the custom of Bayreuth that the latter Parsifal presents a resemblance to the traditional representations of the Saviour; the idea being, we must think, to indicate, stamped on the exterior man, this soul's aspiration towards likeness with the Divine Pattern; or, perhaps, visibly to state that here, too, is a gentle and selfless lover of men, all of whose forces bent on a mission of deliverance.

Gurnemanz, watching him attentively, recognises the slayer, long ago, of the swan, the stupid boy whom he had turned out of the temple. Then he recognises, too, the Spear.

Parsifal, rising from his prayer, gazes quietly around him and recognises Gurnemanz. To the question of the latter, how and whence he comes, he replies: "I am come by ways of wandering and pain. Can I believe myself at last delivered from them, since I hear once more the rustle of this forest, and behold you, worthy elder? Or am I still baffled in my search for the right road? Everything looks changed. . . ."

PARSIFAL

"What road is it you seek?" Gurnemanz inquires. "The road to him whose profound wail I heard of yore in wondering stupidity, and the instrument of whose healing I now dare believe myself elected to be. . . ." All this long time he has vainly sought the road back to the Grail, whether hindered by Kundry's curse, or cut off by some stain left upon his nature from his brief hour in the deadly garden, which must be cleansed by such prolonged ordeal. He relates the desperate battle in all his wanderings to keep safe the Sacred Spear,—which, behold, he is now bringing home! Gurnemanz's joy bursts forth unbounded. Then he, too, makes his friend even over the past. Since the day of his presence among them, the trouble then revealed to him has increased to the last point of distress. Amfortas, revolting against the torments of his soul, and desiring naught but death, refuses to perform the office of the Grail, by which his life would be prolonged. The knights, deprived of their heavenly nourishment, deprived of a leader, have lost their old strength and courage. They seek their sustenance of herbs and roots, like the animals, in the forest. No longer are they called to holy warfare in distant lands. Titurel, unrenewed by the vision of the Grail, is dead. . . . At the relation of these mournful events, grief assails Parsifal, who holds himself responsible for all this wretchedness, by reason of his long-delayed return, which he must regard as a consequence of sins and folly of his own,—grief beyond what the human frame is fitted to endure, and he is again swooning, as at the evil news in the first act. Kundry hurries with water from the cell, but Gurnemanz stops her; he has in thought larger purifications for the pilgrim in whom his prophetic mind discerns one ordained to fulfill this very day a sacred office. "So let him be made clean of all stain, let the dust be washed from

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

him of his long wandering." They ease him upon the moss beside the consecrated spring, remove his greaves and coat of mail. As he revives a little, he asks faintly: "Shall I be taken to-day to Amfortas?" Gurnemanz assures him that he shall, for on this day the burial of Titurel takes place, which Gurnemanz must attend, and Amfortas has pledged himself, in honour of his father, to uncover once more the Grail. Kundry during this, on her knees, has been bathing the pilgrim's feet. He watches her, at her devoted lowly task, in wonder: "You have washed my feet," he speaks; "let now the friend pour water on my head!" Gurnemanz obeys, besprinkling him with a baptismal intention. Kundry takes from her bosom a golden phial, and, having poured ointment on his feet, dries them, in the custom of the day when she was Herodias, with her long hair; by this repetition of a famous act intending perhaps to signify that she is a sinner and that he has raised her from sin. "You have anointed my feet," speaks Parsifal again; "let now the brother-at-arms of Titurel anoint my head, for on this day he shall hail me as king." Whereupon Gurnemanz anoints him as king. Kundry has been gazing with a devout hushed face. There is no sign that he recognises her, but, as if his soul recognised some quality of her soul, as if some need in her called to him, he dips water from the sacred well and sprinkles her head: "My first ministration shall be this: I baptize thee! Have faith in the Redeemer!" And Kundry, the curse being lifted which had dried up in her the fountain of tears, bows to the earth abundantly weeping.

At this point it is that the vague waftures of sweetness which have been fitfully soliciting us all through these scenes, concentrate themselves and make their call irresistible. Parsifal becomes aware of it. With his sense of the absolution

PARSIFAL

from sin for both of them, in baptism, invaded by deep peace, he gazes around him in soft enchantment: "How more than usual lovely the meadows appear to me to-day! True, I have known wonder-flowers, clasping me with eager tendrils so high as my head; but never had I seen blades, blossoms, flowers, so mild and tender, nor ever did, to my sense, all nature give forth a fragrance so innocently sweet, or speak to me with such amiable confidence!" "That," explains Gurnemanz, "is Good-Friday's Charm. . . ." "Alas!" wails Parsifal, "that day of supreme agony! Ought not on this day everything which blooms and breathes to be steeped in mourning and tears?" "You see," replies Gurnemanz, "that it is not so. They are the sinners' tears of repentance which to-day bathe meadow and plain with a holy dew; that is why they look so fresh and fair. To-day all created things rejoice upon the earth once trodden by the Saviour's feet, and wish to offer Him their prayers. Beyond them it is to see Him upon the Cross, wherefore they turn their eyes to redeemed man. Man feels himself delivered from the burden and terror of sin, through God's sacrifice of love made clean and whole. The grasses and flowers become aware of this, they mark that on this day the foot of man spares to trample them, that, even as God with a heavenly patience bears with man and once suffered for his sake, man in pious tribute treads softly to avoid crushing them. All creation gives thanks for this, all the short-lived things that bloom; for to-day all Nature, absolved from sin, regains her day of Innocence." The exquisiteness of this passage, the Good-Friday Spell (*Charfreitag's Zauber*), can hardly be conveyed; if one says the music is worthy of the theme, one has but given a hint of the overearthly quality of its sweetness.

Kundry has slowly raised her head and fixed upon Par-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

sifal her prayerful wet eyes. Either from his recent contemplation of the flowery lea, or some occult association of her personality with the past, the flowers of Klingsor's garden come into his mind. "I saw them wither who had smiled on me. May they not also be hungering for redemption now? . . . Your tears, too, are turned to blessed dew. . . . You weep, and see, the meadow blooms in joy!" He stoops and kisses her gently upon the forehead.

Bells are heard summoning the knights to the Castle. Gurnemanz brings from the cell the mantle of a knight of the Grail, and places it upon Parsifal's shoulders. Parsifal grasps the Spear, and the three vanish from sight among the trees. Again, but from the opposite direction, we approach the Castle; the sound of bells increases as we pass through the granite portal and the vaulted corridors. We are once more in the domed hall. All is as we left it, save for the tables, which, become useless, are no longer there. Again the doors open at the back and from each issues forth a company of knights, the one bearing the bier of Titurel, the other carrying the litter of Amfortas and the shrine of the Grail, while they chant, in question and response, a song of reproachful tenor. "Whom do you bring, with tokens of mourning, in the dark casket?" "The funereal casket holds the hero into whose charge the very God entrusted Himself. Titurel we bring." "Who slew him, whom God Himself held in His care?" "The killing burden of age slew him, when he no longer might behold the Grail." "Who prevented him from beholding the glory of the Grail?" "He whom you carry, the sinful Keeper." The latter they now urge to fulfill his promise of exposing the Grail, and, deeply moved by the sight of his father's face and the outburst of lamentation which follows the folding back of the pall from it, he appears on the point of satis-

PARSIFAL

fyng them; but, as in their eagerness they hem him around with injunctions almost threatening, he is seized with a revulsion once more against the task imposed on him. He springs from his high seat and stands among them begging that rather they will kill him. "Already I feel the night of death closing around me, and must I be forced back into life? You demented! Who shall compel me to live? Death alone it is in your power to give!" He tears open his garment and offers his breast. "Forward, heroes! Slay the sinner with his affliction! The Grail perchance will glow for you then of Itself!"

But the knights shrink away. Then it is that Parsifal, who with Gurnemanz and Kundry has entered unnoticed, advances and with the point of the Sacred Spear touches Amfortas's wound. "One weapon alone avails. The wound can be closed only by the Spear which made it. Be whole, pardoned and absolved, for I now hold the office in your stead!" Amfortas's countenance of holy ecstasy proclaims the instant virtue of the remedy. As Parsifal holds up to the enraptured gaze of the knights the Spear which he has brought back to them, the Parsifal-motif is heard again, for the last time, triumphant, broad, and glorious. He proceeds to perform the rite which had been the duty of Amfortas. A glory rains upon the altar. At the glowing of the Grail, Titurel, returning for a moment to life, lifts himself on his bier with a gesture of benediction. As Parsifal moves the Chalice softly above the kneeling assembly, a white dove descends from on high and floats above his head. Kundry, with her eyes turned toward all these luminous things, sinks softly upon the altar-steps, the life-giving Grail having given her life too, in the form of desired death. With the interwoven Grail and Faith and Spear music letting down as if a curtain of silver and azure and gold, the poem closes.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

One has heard it objected, as at least strange, that when the search after knowledge is so unquestionably meritorious, and study, as we count it, one of the conditions of progress, and learning a lamp to our feet, an ideal should be made of total ignorance, such as Parsifal's. But surely the point is a different one. The point is not Parsifal's ignorance—except, perhaps, in so far as it made for innocence—but the qualities which he possessed, and which one may possess, in spite of ignorance. It is a comparison of values which is established. Through the object-lesson of Parsifal, Wagner is saying, after his fashion and inversely, what Saint Paul says: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, . . . though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, . . . and have not charity, I am nothing; . . . it availeth me nothing." The supremacy of charity, love of others, is the point illustrated.

One tributary to the mighty stream of our interest in the opera of Parsifal has its spring in the date of its appearance. It comes as the poet's last word. What a procession of heroes has passed before us—beautiful, brave, romantic,—how fit, every one, to capture the imagination! Towering a little above the rest, Siegfried, the *Uebermensch*, the Overman. But finally, with the effect of a conclusion reached, a judgment, the hero whose heroism differs in quality from that of the others, the lowly of heart, whose dominant trait is *Mitleid*—compassion, sympathy with the woes of others, who pities swans and women and the sinful and the suffering, and gives his strength to helping them, and sanctifies himself for their sake.

THE RHINE-GOLD

THE RHINE-GOLD

IN the beginning was the Gold,—beautiful, resplendent, its obvious and simple part to reflect sunlight and be a joy to the eyes; containing, however, apparently of its very nature, the following mysterious quality: a ring fashioned from it would endow its possessor with what is vaunted as immeasurable power, and make him master of the world. This power shows itself afterwards undefined in some directions and circumscribed in others, one never fully grasps its law; one plain point of it, however, was to subject to the owner of the ring certain inferior peoples and reveal to him the treasures hidden in the earth, which he could force his thralls to mine and forge and so shape that they might be used to buy and subject the superior peoples, thus making him actually, if successful in corruption, master of the world.

But this ring could by no possibility be fashioned except by one who should have utterly renounced love.

For these things no reason is given: they were, like the Word.

One feels an allegory. As the poem unfolds, one is often conscious of it. It is well to hold the thread of it lightly and let it slip as soon as it becomes puzzling, settling down contentedly in the joy of simple story. The author himself, very much a poet, must be supposed to have done something of the sort. He does not follow to any trite conclusion the thought he has started, he has small care for minor consistencies. Large-mindedly he drops what has become inconvenient, and

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

prefers simply beauty, interest, the story. Thus his personages have a body, and awaken sympathies which would hardly attach to purely allegorical figures; a charm of livingness invests the world he has created.

The Gold's home was in the Rhine, at the summit of a high, pointed rock, where it caught the beams of the sun and shed them down through the waves, brightening the dim water-world, gladdening the water-folk. That was its sole use, but for thus making golden daylight in the deep it was worshipped, besung, called adoring names, by nixies swimming around it in a sort of joyous rite.

The mysterious potentiality of the gold was known to the Rhine-god; three of his daughters had been instructed by him, and detailed to guard the treasure. Some faculty of divination warned him of danger to it, and of the quarter from whence this danger threatened. But nixies—even when burdened by cares of state—are just nixies; those three seem to have lived to laugh before all else—to laugh and chase one another and play in the cool green element, singing all the while a fluent, cradling song whose sweetness might well allure boatmen and bathers.

Below the Rhine lay Nibelheim, the kingdom of mists and night, the home of the Nibelungs,—dark gnomes, dwarfs, living in the bowels of the earth, digging its metals, excelling in cunning as smiths.

The Rhine did not continue flowing water quite down to its bed; the boundary-line of Nibelheim seems to have been just above it; the water there turned to fine mist; among the rough rocks of the river-bed were passages down into the Under-world.

Up through one of these, one day before sunrise, while the Rhine was melodiously thundering in its majestic course—they

THE RHINE-GOLD

are the Rhine-motifs which open the piece,—came clambering, by some chance, the Nibelung Alberich. His night-accustomed eyes, as he blinked upward into the green light, were caught by a silvery glinting of scales, flashes of flesh-pink and floating hair. The Rhine-maidens, guardians of the gold, were frolicking around it; but this did not appear, for the sun had not yet risen to wake it into radiance. The dwarf saw just a shimmering of young forms, was touched with a natural desire, and called to them, asking them to come down to him, and let him join in their play.

At the sound of the strange voice and the sight of the strange figure, Flosshilde, a shade more sensible than her sisters, cries out to them: "Look to the gold! Father warned us of an enemy of the sort!" and the three rally quickly around the treasure. But it soon appears that the stranger is but a dark, small, hairy, ugly, harmless-seeming, amorous creature, uttering his wishes very simply. The watch over the gold is relinquished, and a little amusement sought in tantalizing and befooling the clumsy wooer.

Alberich, later a figure touched with terror and followed with dislike, is likeable in this scene, almost gentle, one's sympathies come near being with him. The music describes him awkward and heavy, slipping on the rocks, sneezing in the wet; a note of protest is frequent in his voice. All the music relating to him, now or later, is joyless, whatever beside it may be.

The sisters have their fun with the poor gnome, whose innocence of nixies' ways is apparent in the long time it is before all reliance in their good faith leaves him. Woglinde invites him nearer. With difficulty he climbs the slippery rocks to reach her. When he can nearly touch her—he is saying, "Be my sweetheart, womanly child!"—she darts from him. And the sisters laugh their delicious inhuman laugh.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Woglinde then plunges to the river-bed, calling to Alberich, "Come down! Here you surely can grasp me!" He owns it will be easier for him down there, and lets himself down, when the sprite rises, light as a bubble, to the surface. He is calling her an impudent fish and a deceitful young lady, when Wellgunde sighs, "Thou beautiful one!" He turns quickly, inquiring naïvely, "Do you mean me?" She says, "Have nothing to do with Woglinde. Turn sooner to me!" He is but too willing, vows that he thinks her much the more beautiful and gleaming, and prays she will come further down. She stops short of arm's-length. He pours forth his elementary passion. She feigns a wish to see her handsome gallant more closely. After a brief comedy of scanning his face, with insulting promptness she appears to change her mind, and with the unkindest descriptive terms slipping from his grasp swims away. And again rings the chorus of malicious musical laughter. Then the cruellest of the three, Flosshilde, takes the poor swain in hand. She not only comes down, she allows herself to be held, she wreathes her slender arms around him, presses him tenderly and flatters him in music well calculated to daze with delight. He is not warned by her words, as, while they sit embraced, she says, "Thy piercing glance, thy stubborn beard, might I see the one, feel the other, forever! The rough locks of thy prickly hair, might they forever flow around Flosshilde! Thy toad's shape, thy croaking voice, oh, might I, wondering and mute, see and hear them exclusively for ever!" It is the sudden mocking laughter of the two listening sisters which draws him from his dream—when Flosshilde slips from his hold, and the three again swim merrily around, and laugh, and when his angry wail rises call down to him to be ashamed of himself! But not even then do they let him rest; they hold forth new hopes, inviting and exciting him to chase them, till fairly aflame with

THE RHINE-GOLD

love and wrath he begins a mad pursuit, climbing, slipping, falling to the foot of the rocks, starting upwards again, clutching at this one and that, still eluded with ironical laughter, until, realizing his impotence, breathless and quaking with rage, he shakes his clenched hand at them, foaming, "Let me catch one with this fist!"

He is glaring upward at them, speechless with fury, when his eyes become fixed upon a brilliant point, growing in size and radiance until the whole flood is illumined. There is an exquisite hush of a moment. The sun has risen and kindled its reflection in the gold. The music describes better than words the spreading of tremulous light down through the deep. Through the wavering ripples of water and light cuts the bright call of the gold, the call to wake up and behold. Again and again it rings, regularly a golden voice. The Rhine-daughters have quickly forgotten their victim. They begin their blissful circumswimming of their idol, with a song in ecstatic celebration of it, so penetratingly, joyously sweet, that you readily forgive them their naughtiness: "Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold! Luminous joy! How laugh'st thou so bright and clear!" . . .

Alberich cannot detach his eyes from the vision. "What is it, you sleek ones," he asks in awed curiosity, "glancing and gleaming up there?"

"Now where have you barbarian lived," they reply, "never to have heard of the Rhine-gold?" They mock his ignorance; returning to their teasing mood, they invite him to come and revel with them in the streaming light.

"If it is no good save for you to swim around, it is of small use to me!" is Alberich's dejected observation. As if their treasure had been disparaged, Woglinde informs him that he would hardly despise the gold if he knew all of its wonder! And Wellgunde follows this part-revelation with the whole secret:

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

The whole world would be his inheritance who should fashion out of the Rhine-gold a magic ring. Vainly Flosshilde tries to silence her sisters. Wellgunde and Woglinde laugh at her prudence, reminding her of the gold's assured safety in view of the condition attached to the creation of the ring. This is described in a solemn phrase, serious as the pronouncing of a vow: "Only he who forswears the power of love, only he who casts from him the joys of love, can learn the spell by which the gold may be forced into a ring."—Wherefore, they hold, the gold is safe, "for all that lives wishes to love, no one will give up love," least of all this Nibelung, the heat of whose sentiments had come near scorching them! And they laugh and swim around the gold with their light-hearted Wallalaleia, diversified with mocking personalities to the gnome down in the gloom.

But they have miscalculated. Without suspecting it, they have gone too far. The dwarf stands staring at the gold, dreaming what it would be to own the world. He is hardly at that moment, thanks to them, in love with love. His resolution is suddenly taken. He springs to the rock, shouting: "Mock on! Mock on! The Nibelung is coming!" With fearful activity, hate-inspired strength, he rapidly climbs the rock on which he had so slipped and floundered before. The foolish nymphs, though they see his approach, are still far from understanding. They still believe it is themselves he seeks to seize. They now not only laugh—they laugh, as the stage-directions have it, "*im tollsten Uebermuth*," the craziest towering insolence of high spirits. "Save yourselves, the gnome is raving! He has gone mad with love!"

He has reached the summit of the rock, he has laid hands on the gold. He cries, "You shall make love in the dark! . . . I quench your light, I tear your gold from the reef. I shall

THE RHINE-GOLD

forge me the ring of vengeance, for, let the flood hear me declare it: I here curse love!" Tearing from its socket their splendid lamp, which utters just once its golden cry, all distorted and lamentable, he plunges with it into the depths, leaving sudden night over the scene in which the wild sisters, shocked at last into sobriety, with cries of Help and Woe start in pursuit of the robber. His harsh laugh of triumph drifts back from the caves of Nibelheim.

Then occurs a gradual transformation-scene both to the eye and the ear. The rocks disappear, black waves flow past, the whole all the while appearing to sink. Clouds succeed the water, mist the clouds. This finally clears, revealing a calm and lovely scene on the mountain-heights. The music has during this been painting the change, too: Sounds of running water, above which hovers a moment, a memory of the scene just past and a foreboding of its sorrowful consequences, the strain signifying the renunciation of love; when this dies away, the motif of the ring, to be heard so many times after, its fateful character plainly conveyed by the notes, which also literally describe its circular form. By what magic of modulation the uninitiated cannot discern, the ring-motif, as the water by degrees is translated into mist, slides by subtle changes into a motif which seems, when it is reached, conspicuously different from it, the motif of the Gods' Abode.

There in the distance it stands, when the mists have perfectly cleared, bathed in fresh morning light, the tall just-completed castle, with shimmering battlements, crowning a high rocky mountain, at whose base, far down out of sight, flows the Rhine. For the Rhine is the centre of the world we are occupied with: under it, the Nibelungs; above it, the Gods; beside it, the giants and the insignificant human race. The music itself here, while the dwelling of the gods is coming into

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

sight, seems to build a castle: story above story it rises, topped with gleaming pinnacles, one, lighter and taller than all the rest, piercing the clouds.

In the foreground lie sleeping side by side, on a flowery bank, the god and goddess Wotan and Fricka.

He lies dreaming happily of the abode from which the world is to be commanded by him, to the display of immeasurable power and his eternal honour. His wife's sleep is less easy. For the situation is not as free from complications as his untroubled slumbers might lead one to suppose. Wotan has employed to build him this stronghold the giants Fasolt and Fafner, formerly his enemies, but bound to peace by treaties, and has promised them the reward stipulated for, Freia, goddess of beauty and youth, sister of Fricka. And this he has done without any serious thought of keeping his word. "*Nie sann es ernstlich mein Sinn,*" he assures Fricka, when, starting in dismay from her sleep and beholding the completed burg, she reminds him that the time is come for payment, and asks what shall they do. Loge, he enlightens her, counselled the compact and promised to find the means of evading it. He relies upon him to do so. This calm frankness in the god, with its effect of personal clearness from all sense of guilt, suggests the measure of Wotan's distinguishing simplicity. Referring later to the dubious act which so effectually laid the foundation of sorrows, he says, "Unknowingly deceitful, I practised untruth. Loge artfully tempted me." He explains himself to Fricka, when she asks why he continues to trust the crafty Loge, who has often already brought them into straits: "Where frank courage is sufficient, I ask counsel of no one. But slyness and cunning are needed to turn to advantage the ill-will of adversaries, and that is the talent of Loge."

Strong and calm is Wotan; music of might and august beauty,

THE RHINE-GOLD

large music, supports every one of his utterances. There is no departure from this, even when his signal fallibility is in question. Waftures of Walhalla most commonly accompany his steps; the close of his speech is frequently marked by the sturdy motif of his spear, the spear inseparable from him, cut by him from the World-Ash, carved with runes establishing the bindingness of compacts, by aid of which he had conquered the world, subdued the giants, the Nibelungs, and Loge, the Spirit of Fire.

Athirst for power he is, before all: in this trait lie the original seeds of his destruction; it is for the sake of the tokens of power, the castle and later the ring, that he commits the injustices which bring about ruin. Athirst, too, for wisdom: he has given one of his eyes for Wisdom, in the person of Fricka, who combines in herself law and order and domestic virtue. And athirst for love,—something of a grievance to Fricka. "*Ehr ich die Frauen doch mehr als dich freut,*" "I honour women more than pleases you," he retorts to her reproach of contempt for woman's love and worth, evidenced in his light ceding of Freia.

He calls himself and all call him a god, adding "eternal" even when the gods' end is glaringly at hand. The other gods look to him as chief among them. But he is ever acknowledging the existence of something outside and above himself, a law, a moral necessity, which it is no use to contend against; through which, do what he may, disaster finally overtakes him for having tried to disregard it. There is a stray hint from him that the world is his very possession and that he could at will destroy it; but this which so many facts contradict we may regard as a dream. Yet he feels toward the world most certainly a responsibility, such as a sovereign's toward his people; a duty, part of which is that for its sake he must not allow his spear

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

to be dishonoured. Compacts it must sacredly guard. All his personal troubles come from this necessity, this constant check to him: he must respect covenants, his spear stands for their integrity. Alberich in a bitter discussion declares his knowledge of where the god is weak, and reminds him that if he should break a covenant sanctioned by the spear in his hand, this, the symbol of his power, would split into spray!

He is perhaps best understood, on the whole, with his remorse and despair, the tortures of his heart and his struggle with his soul, if one can conceive him as a sort of sublimated aristocrat; a resplendent great personage—just imaginable in the dawn of history, when there were giants upon earth—lifted far above the ordinary of the race by superior gifts, “reigning through beauty,” as Fasolt describes; possessing faculties not shared by common mortals, but these rudimentary or else in their decline: the power of divination, not always accurate or clear; the power of miracle, not altogether to be relied upon; remaining young indefinitely, yet not wholly enfranchised from time and circumstance; living indefinitely, but recognising himself as perishable, and passing at last, swallowed in twilight.

A great warrior and leader of heroes, inciter of men to bold actions and novel flights; some of his titles: Father of Hosts, Father of Battles, Father of Victory; riding in the storm-clouds on his *Luft-ross*, his air-horse, whose hoof-beats and neigh fill us with excited delight. But his air-horse cannot overtake Brünnhilde’s air-horse, in his pursuit of her, and Grane reaching the goal falls exhausted. . . .

A great reveller: reference is repeatedly made to the light-minded, light-hearted, careless humour of the gods, their glorious feasts and joyous life in the light up there. Their tribe is qualified as “laughing.” Wotan’s unshakable dignity indeed

THE RHINE-GOLD

does not prevent a quick easy laugh. And he shows the true aristocratic temper in being little moved by the sorrows of those beneath and unrelated to him: one of his laughs, which we witness, is for the howls of a poor wee dwarf who had been savagely beaten.

And so this powerful clan-chief had had a fancy for a house to live in worthy of their greatness. Fricka had fallen in with his desire, but for reasons of her own. To him the citadel was a fresh addition to his power. But Fricka had been "*um des Gatten Treu' besorgt*," "ill at ease with regard to her consort's fidelity," and had thought the beautiful dwelling might keep him at home. With her words, "*Herrliche Wohnung, wonniger Hausrath*," "Beautiful dwelling, delectable household order," first occurs the winning strain which afterward stands for Fricka in her love of domesticity, or, separate from her, for the pure charm of home.

When the giants, however, had been subsidised for the great work of building the house, the narrow-conscienced women had been kept out of the way while an agreement was reached with the builders; a grievance which Fricka remembers, and does not let her spouse forget, when the evil consequences of his act are upon them. Fricka constitutes something of a living reproach to her husband, though a certain tender regard still exists between them through the introductory Opera. A thankless part is Fricka's, like that of Reason in opposition to Feeling and Genius.

Now Loge, who had been tamed by the conquering spear, hated his tamer. He craved back his liberty, and, as the Norn tells us later in *Goetterdaemmerung*, "tried to free himself by gnawing at the runes on the shaft of the spear." He gave counsel to Wotan which followed must create difficulties from which the god could deliver himself only by an injustice; and

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

this injustice Loge seems clearly to have recognised from the first as the beginning of the end of the strength of the gods. The subtle Loge is more widely awake than Wotan to the "power not ourselves which makes for righteousness." He counselled him to buy the giants' labor by the promise of Freia, knowing that the gods could never endure to let the amiable goddess go. He led them to believe that when the time came he would give them further counsel by which to retain her. And his word Wotan chose to trust, and gave his heart over to the untroubled enjoyment of his plans' completion.

And now Freia comes running to him in terror, crying that one of the giants has told her he is come to fetch her. With her entrance we first hear the slender sweet phrase, delicately wandering upward, which after for a time denoting Freia, comes to mean for us just beauty. Wotan calms the maiden in distress, and asks, as one fancies, a little uneasily, "Have you seen nothing of Loge?"

The arrival of the giants is one of the great comedy moments of the play. Their colossally heavy tread, musically rendered, never fails to call forth laughter from some corner in us of left-over childhood. It is like the ogre's Fee-faw-fum. Fasolt is a good giant, his shaggy hair is blond, his fur-tunic white, and his soft big heart all given over to the touchingly lovely Freia. Fafner is a bad giant and his hair and furs are black. He is much cleverer than his brother. They carry as walking-sticks the trunks of trees.

They make it known that they have come for their wages. Wotan bids them, with a sturdy aplomb worthy of his godhead, state their wishes. What shall the wages be? Fasolt, a shade astonished, replies, "That, of course, which we settled upon. Have you forgotten so soon? Freia. . . . It is in the bond that she shall follow us home."

THE RHINE-GOLD

"Have you taken leave of your senses . . . with you bond?" asks Wotan, with a quick flash. "You must think of a different recompense. Freia is far too precious to me."

The giant is for a moment still, unable to speak for indignation; but recovering his voice he makes to the "son of light" a series of observations eminently to the point. Wotan to these makes no more retort than as if the words had not been spoken; but—to gain time till Loge shall arrive—when the giant has quite finished, he inquires, "What, after all, can the charm of the amiable goddess signify to you clumsy boors?" Fasolt enlarges, "You, reigning through beauty, shimmering lightsome race, lightly you offer to barter for stone towers woman's loveliness. We simpletons labour with toil-hardened hands to earn a sweet woman who shall dwell with us poor devils. . . . And you mean to call the bargain naught? . . ."

Fafner gloomily checks him: Words will not help them. And the possession of Freia in itself is to his mind of little account. But of great account to take her from the gods. In her garden grow golden apples, she alone has the art of tending these. Eating this fruit maintains her kinsmen in unwaning youth. Were Freia removed, they must age and fade. Wherefore let Freia be seized!

Wotan frets underbreath, "Loge is long acoming!"

Freia's cries, as the giants lay hands upon her, bring her brothers Donner and Froh—the god of Thunder and the god of the Fields—quickly to her side. A combat between them and the giants is imminent, when Wotan parts the antagonists with his spear, "Nothing by violence!" and he adds, what it might be thought he had lost sight of, "My spear is the protector of bargains!"

And then finally, finally, comes in sight Loge. Wotan lets out his breath in relief: "Loge at last!"

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

The music has introduced Loge by a note-painting as of fire climbing up swiftly through airiest fuel. There is a quick flash or two, like darting tongues of flame. A combination of swirling and bickering and pulsating composes the commonest Loge-motif, but the variety is endless of the fire's caprices. Fantastical, cheery, and light it is mostly, sinister sometimes, suggestive of treachery, but terrible never; its beauty rather than its terror is reproduced. So characteristic are the fire-motifs that after a single hearing a person instinctively when one occurs looks for some sign or suggestion of Loge.

He stands now upon the rock, a vivid, charming, disquieting apparition, with his wild red hair and fluttering scarlet cloak. The arch-hypocrite wears always a consummately artless air. He comes near winning us by a bright perfect good-humour, which is as of the quality of an intelligence without a heart. The love of mischief for its own sake, which is one of his chief traits, might be thought to account easily for his many enemies.

He is related to the gods, a half-god, but is regarded coldly by his kin. Wotan is his single friend in the family, and with Wotan he preserves the attitude of a self-acknowledged underling. He stands in fear of his immediate strength, while nourishing a hardly disguised contempt for his wit, as well as that of his cousins collectively. A secret hater of them all, and clear-minded in estimating them. A touch of Mephistophilian there is in the pleasure which he seems to find in the contemplation of the canker-spot in Wotan's nature, drawing from the god over and over again, as if the admission refreshed him, that he has no intention of dealing justly toward the Rhine-maidens.

"Is this your manner of hastening to set aright the evil bargain concluded by you?" Wotan chides, as he appears from the valley.

THE RHINE-GOLD

"How? What bargain concluded by me? . . ."

Pinned down to accounting for himself, "I promised," he says, "to think over the matter, and try to find means of loos-ing you from the bargain. . . . But how should I have promised to perform the impossible?" Under the pressure of all their angers, he finally airily delivers himself: "Having at heart to help you, I travelled the world over, visiting its most recondite corners, in search of such a substitute for Freia as might be found acceptable to the giants. Vainly I sought, and now at last I plainly see that nothing upon this earth is so precious that it can take the place in man's affection of the loveliness and worth of woman."

Struck and uplifted by this thought, the gods, moved, look in one another's faces, and the music expresses the sweet expansion of the heart overflowing with thoughts of beauty and love. It is one of the memorable moments of the Prologue.

"Everywhere," proceeds Loge, "far as life reaches, in water, earth, and air, wherever is quickening of germs and stirring of nature's forces, I investigated and inquired what there might be in existence that a man should hold dearer than woman's beauty and worth? Everywhere my inquiry was met with derision. No creature, in water, earth, or air, is willing to re-nounce love and woman."

As he pauses, the gods again gaze at one another, with tender tearful smiles, in an exalted emotion over the recognition of this touching truth; and the music reexpresses that blissful expansion of the heart.

"Only one did I see," Loge says further—the light fading out of the music—"who had renounced love; for red gold he had forsworn the favor of woman." He relates Alberich's theft of the gold, as it had been told him by the Rhine-daughters,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

who had made him their advocate with Wotan, to procure its restitution.

But their plea meets with a deaf ear. "You are stupid, indeed, if not perverse," the god answers Loge, when he delivers their appeal. "You find me in straits myself, how should I help others?"

The giants have been listening to this talk about Alberich, an ancient enemy of theirs. The cleverer brother asks Loge, "What great advantage is involved in the possession of the gold, that the Nibelung should find it all-sufficient?" Loge explains. There drift back to Wotan's memory runes of the Ring, and the thought readily arises that it would be well he possessed the ring himself.

"But how, Loge, should I learn the art to shape it?" At the reply that he who would practise the magic by which it could be shaped must renounce love, the god turns away in conclusive disrelish. Loge informs him that he would in any case have been too late: Alberich has already successfully forged the ring.

This alters the face of things.

"But if he possesses a ring of such power," says simple Donner, "it must be taken from him, lest he bring us all under its compulsion!"

Wotan hesitates no more. "The ring I must have!"

"Yes, now, as long as love need not be renounced, it will be easy to obtain it," says simple Froh.

"Easy as mocking—child's-play!" sneers Loge.

"Then do you tell us, how? . . ." Wotan's fine majestic simplicity has no false pride.

The Serpent gleefully replies, "By theft! What a thief stole, you steal from the thief! Could anything be easier? Only, Alberich is on his guard, you will have to proceed craftily

THE RHINE-GOLD

if you would overreach the robber . . . in order to return their treasure to the Rhine-daughters, who earnestly entreat you."

"The Rhine-daughters?" chafes Wotan. "What do you trouble me with them?"

And the goddess of Wisdom,—more sympathetic on the whole in this exhibition of weakness than in her hard justice later—exposing the core of her feminine being, breaks in: "I wish to hear nothing whatever of that watery brood. Many a man, greatly to my vexation, have they lured under while he was bathing, with promises of love."

The giants have been listening and have taken counsel together. Fafner now approaches Wotan. "Hear, Wotan. . . . Keep Freia. . . . We have fixed upon a lesser reward. We will take in her stead the Nibelung's gold."

Wotan comes near losing his temper. "What I do not own, I shall bestow upon you shameless louts?"

Fafner expresses a perfect confidence in Wotan's equipment for obtaining the gold.

"For you I shall go to this trouble?" rails the irritated god, "For you I shall circumvent this enemy? Out of all measure impudent and rapacious my gratitude has made you clowns! . . ."

Fasolt who has only half-heartedly accepted his brother's decision in favor of the gold, stays to hear no more, but seizes Freia. With a warning that she shall be regarded as a hostage till evening, but that if when they return the Rhine-gold is not on the spot as her ransom, they will keep her forever, the giants hurry her off.

Her cry for help rings back. Her brothers, in the act of rushing to the rescue, look at Wotan for his sanction. No encouragement is to be gathered from his face. He stands motionless, steeped in perplexity, in conflict with himself.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Loge has now a few moments' pure enjoyment in safely tormenting his superiors. He stands, with his fresh, ingenuous air, on a point overlooking the valley, and describes the giants' progress, as does the music, too. "Not happy is Freia, hanging on the back of the rough ones as they wade through the Rhine. . . ." Her dejected kindred wince.

The heavy footsteps die away. Loge returning his attention to the gods, voices his amazement at the sight which meets him: "Am I deceived by a mist? Am I misled by a dream? How wan and fearful and faded you do look! The glow is dead in your cheeks, the lightening quenched in your glances. Froh, it is still early morning! Donner, you are dropping your hammer! What ails Fricka? Is it chagrin to see the greyness of age creeping over Wotan?" Sounds of woe burst from all, save Wotan, who with his eyes on the ground still stands absorbed in gloomy musing.

The solution of the puzzle suddenly, as he feigns, flashes upon Loge: This is the result of Freia's leaving them! They had not yet that morning tasted her apples. Now, of necessity, those golden apples of youth in her garden, which she alone could cultivate, will decay and drop. "Myself," he says, "I shall be less inconvenienced than you, because she was ever grudging to me of the exquisite fruit, for I am only half of as good lineage as you, Resplendent Ones. On the other hand, you depended wholly upon the rejuvenating apples; the giants knew that and are plainly practising against your lives. Now bethink yourselves how to provide against this. Without the apples, old and grey, a mock to the whole world, the dynasty of the gods must perish!"

With sudden resolution, Wotan starts from his dark study. "Up, Loge! Down with me to Nibelheim! I will conquer the gold!"

THE RHINE-GOLD

"The Rhine-daughters, then," speaks wicked Loge, "may look to have their prayer granted?"

Wotan harshly silences him. "Be still, chatterer! . . . Freia the good, Freia must be ransomed!"

Loge drops the subject and offers his services as guide. "Shall we descend through the Rhine?"

The Rhine, with its infesting nymphs? . . .

"Not through the Rhine!" says Wotan.

"Then through the sulphur-cleft slip down with me!" And Loge vanishes down a cleft in the rock, through which Wotan, after bidding his family wait for him where they are until evening, follows.

Thick vapour pours forth from the sulphur-cleft, dimming and shortly blotting out the scene. We are travelling downward into the earth. A dull red glow gradually tinges the vapour. Sounds of diminutive hammers upon anvils become distinct. The orchestra takes up their suggestion and turns it into a simple monotonous strongly rhythmical air—never long silent in this scene—which comes to mean for us the little toiling Nibelungs, the cunning smiths. A great rocky subterranean cave running off on every side into rough shafts, is at last clearly visible, lighted by the ruddy reflection of forge-fires.

This is where Alberich reigns and by the power of the ring compels his enslaved brothers to labour for him. Renouncing love has not been good for the disposition of Alberich. It is not only the insatiable lust of gold and power now darkening the soul-face of the earlier fairly gentle-natured Nibelung, it is a savage gloating cruelty, bespeaking one unnaturally loveless; it is a sanguinary hatred, too, of all who still can love, of love itself, a thirst and determination to see it completely done away with in the world, exterminated—a sort of fallen angel's

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

sin against the Holy Ghost. A state, beneath the incessant excitement of slave-driving and treasure-amassing, of inexpressible unhappiness, lightened by moments of huge exaltation in the sense of his new power.

We find him, when the cavern glimmers into sight, brutally handling his crumb of a gnome brother. Mime, like Alberich, wins some part of our heart on first acquaintance, which he later ceases to deserve; but in the case of Mime I think it is never wholly withdrawn, even when he is shown to be an unmitigated wretch; he is, to begin with, so little, and he has a funny, fetching twist or quaver in his voice, indicated by the notes themselves of his rather mean little sing-song melodies. Alberich's nominal reason for indulging his present passion for hurting—he is haling Mime by the ear—is that the latter is overslow with certain piece of work which, with minute instructions, he has been ordered to do. Mime, under pressure, produces the article, which he had in truth been trying to keep for his own, suspecting in it some mysterious value. It is the *Tarnhelm*, a curious cap of linked metal. Its uncanny character is confided to us even before we see it at work, by the motif which first appears with its appearance: a motif preparing for some unearthly manifestation the mind pricked to disquieted attention by the weirdness of the air. Alberich places it upon his head, utters a brief incantation, and disappears from sight. A column of vapour stands in his place.

“Do you see me?” asks Alberich's disembodied voice. Mime looks around, astonished. “Where are you? I see you not!” “Then feel me!” cries the power-drunken tyrant, and Mime winces and cowers under blows from an unseen scourge, while Alberich's voice laughs. Out of measure exhilarated by his successful new device for ensuring diligence and inspiring fear, he storms out of hearing with the terrible

THE RHINE-GOLD

words, "Nibelungs all, bow to Alberich! . . . He can now be everywhere at once, keeping watch over you. Rest and leisure are done and over with for you! For him you must labour. . . . His conquered slaves are you forever!" The moment of his overtaking the Nibelungs is indicated by their sudden distant outcry.

Mime has been left crouching and whimpering on the rocky floor. Thus Wotan and Loge find him.

Loge is in all the following scene Wotan's very active vizier, furnishing the invention and carrying out the stratagems. Wotan, except to the eye, takes the background and has little to say; but as the blue of his mantle and the fresh chaplet on his locks strike the eye refreshingly in the fire-reddened cave, so his voice, with echoes in it of the noble upper world, comes like gusts of sweet air.

Loge sets the cowering dwarf on his feet and by artful questions gets the whole story from him of the ring and the Nibelungs' woe. About the Tarnhelm, too, Mime tells Loge. At the recollection of the stripes he has suffered, he rubs his back howling. The gods laugh. That gives Mime the idea that these strangers must be of the great. He is in his turn questioning them, when he hears Alberich's bullying voice approaching. He runs hither and thither in terror and calls to the strangers to look to themselves, Alberich is coming! Wotan quietly seats himself on a stone to await him.

Alberich enters driving before him with his scourge a whole army of little huddling, hurrying Nibelungs, groaning under the weight of great pieces of gold and silver smithwork, which, while he threatens and urges them, they heap in a dusky glimmering mound. In the fancy that they are not obeying fast or humbly enough, he takes the magic ring from his finger, kisses and lifts it commandingly over them, whereupon with

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

cries of dismay they scramble away, scattering down the shafts, in feverish haste to be digging and delving.

Heavy groans are in the music when it refers to the oppression of the Nibelungs; groans so tragic and seriously presented that they bring up the thought of other oppressions and killing labours than those of the Nibelungs. The music which later depicts the amassing of riches, indicates such horror of strain, such fatigue, such hopeless weariness of heart and soul, that the hearer must think with sharpened sympathy of all that part of humanity which represents the shoulder placed against the wheel.

Alberich turns an angry eye upon the intruders: "What do you want?"

It is then most especially that the calm notes of Wotan fall healingly upon the sense: They have heard tales of novel events in Nibelheim, of mighty wonders worked there by Alberich, and are come from curiosity to witness these.

After this simple introduction from the greater personage, his light-foot, volatile, graceful minister takes Alberich in hand and practising confidently upon his intoxicated conceit of power, his pride in the cleverness which had contrived ring and wishing-cap, uses him like a puppet of which all the strings should be in his hand.

Alberich recognises in Loge an old enemy. Loge's reply to Alberich's, "I know you well enough, you and your kind!" is perhaps, with its cheerful dancing flicker, his prettiest bit of self-description. "You know me, childish elf? Then, say, who am I, that you should be surly? In the cold hollow where you lay shivering, how would you have had light and cheering warmth, if Loge had never laughed for you? . . ."

But Alberich seems to remember too many reasons for distrusting him. "I can now, however," he boasts, "defy you

THE RHINE-GOLD

all!" and he calls to their notice the heaped riches,—the *Hort*.

"But," remarks Wotan, "of what use is all that wealth in cheerless Nibelheim, where there is nothing to buy?"

"Nibelheim," replies Alberich, "is good to furnish treasures and to keep them safe. But when they form a sufficient heap, I shall use them to make myself master of the world!"

"And how, my good fellow, shall you accomplish this?"

Alberich has apprehended in this guest one of the immortals, —which, taken into consideration a speech suggestive every time it resounds of calm heights and stately circumstances, is not strange. Alberich hates him, hates them all. This is his exposition of his plan: "You who, lapped in balmy airs, live, laugh, and love up there, with a golden fist I shall catch you all! Even as I renounced love, all that lives shall renounce it! Ensnared and netted in gold, you shall care for gold only! You immortal revellers, cradling yourselves on blissful heights in exquisite pastimes, you despise the black elf! Have a care! . . . For when you men have come to be the servants of my power, your sweetly adorned women, who would despise the dwarf's love, since he cannot hope for love, shall be forced to serve his pleasure. Ha ha! Do you hear? Have a care, have a care, I say, of the army of the night, when the riches of the Nibelungs once climb into the light!"

Wotan, whose Olympian self-sufficiency is usually untroubled by what any mean other-person may say, at this cannot contain himself, but starting to his feet cries out a command for the blasphemous fool's annihilation! Before Alberich, however, has caught the words—his deafness perhaps it is which saves his life—Loge has called Wotan back to his reason. Practising on Alberich's not completely outlived simplicity, he by the ruse of feigning himself very stupid and greatly impressed

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

by his cleverness, now induces him to show off for their greater amazement the power of the Tarnhelm, which it appears has not only the trick of making the wearer at will invisible, but of lending him whatever shape he may choose. Later we find that it has also the power to transport the wearer at pleasure to the ends of the earth in a moment of time.

To put Loge's incredulity to shame, Alberich, Tarnhelm on head, turns himself into a dragon, drawing its cumbersome length across the stage to a fearsome tune which gives all of its uncouthness, and never fails to call forth laughter, like the giants' tread. As a further exhibition of his power, after full measure of flattery in Loge's pretended fright, he at the prompting of the same changes himself into a toad, which has but time for a hop or two, before Wotan places his calm foot upon it. Loge snatches the Tarnhelm off its head and Alberich is seen in his own person writhing under Wotan. Loge binds him fast, and the gods, with their struggling prey between them, hurry off through the pass by which they came.

Then reoccurs, but reversed, the transformation between Nibelheim and the upper world. The region of the stithies is passed, the little hammers are heard. At last Wotan and Loge with Alberich reappear through the sulphur-cleft.

"Look, beloved," says Loge to the unhappy captive, "there lies the world which you think of conquering for your own. Tell me now, what little corner in it do you intend as a kennel for me?" And he dances around him, snapping his fingers to the prettiest, heartlessly merry fire-music.

Alberich replies with raving insult. Wotan's cool voice reminds him of the vanity of this and calls him to the consideration of his ransom. When Alberich, after a time, grumblingly inquires what they will have, he says, largely and frankly, "The treasure, your shining gold."

THE RHINE-GOLD

If he can only retain the ring, reflects Alberich, the loss of the treasure may be quickly repaired. At his request they free his right hand; he touches the ring with his lips and murmurs the spell by which after a moment the swarm of little smoke-grimed Nibelungs arrives groaning and straining under the weight of the Hort; again they pile it in a heap, and at Alberich's command scurry home.

"Now I have paid, now let me go," says the humbled Nibelung-lord, "and that helmet-like ornament which Loge is holding, have the kindness to give it me back." But Loge flings the Tarnhelm on the heap as part of the ransom. Hard to bear is this, but Mime can after all forge another. "Now you have gotten everything; now, you cruel ones, loose the thongs." But Wotan remarks, "You have a gold ring upon your finger; that, I think, belongs with the rest." At this, a madness of terror seizes Alberich. "The ring? . . ." "You must leave it for ransom." "My life—but not the ring!" With that bitter coldness of the aristocrat which in time brings about revolutions, Wotan replies, "It is the ring I ask for—with your life do what you please!" The dull Nibelung pleads still after that, and his words contain thorns which he might reasonably expect to tell: "The thing which I, anguish-harried and curse-crowned, earned through a horrible renunciation, you are to have for your own as a pleasant princely toy? . . . If I sinned, I sinned solely against myself, but against all that has been, is, or shall be, do you, Immortal, sin, if you wrest this ring from me. . . ."

Wotan without further discussion stretches out his hand and tears from Alberich's finger the ring, which gives once more, under this violence, the golden call, saddened and distorted. "Here, the ring!—Your chattering does not establish your right to it!" Alberich drops to earth, felled. Wotan places

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

the ring on his hand and stands in gratified contemplation of it. "I hold here what makes me the mightiest lord of the mighty!"

Loge unties Alberich and bids him slip home. But the Nibelung is past care or fear, and rising to insane heights of hatred lays upon the ring such a curse as might well shake its owner's complacency. "As it came to me through a curse, accursed be this ring! As it lent me power without bounds, let its magic now draw death upon the wearer! Let no possessor of it be happy. . . . Let him who owns it be gnawed by care and him who owns it not be gnawed by envy! Let every one covet, no one enjoy it! . . . Appointed to death, fear-ridden let its craven master be! While he lives, let his living be as dying! The ring's master be the ring's slave,—until my stolen good return to me! . . . Now keep it! Guard it well! My curse you shall not escape!"

"Did you hear his affectionate greeting?" asks Loge, when Alberich has vanished down the rocky cleft.

Wotan, absorbed in the contemplation of the ring, has heard the curse with the same degree of interest he might have bestowed upon the trickle of a brook. He replies magnanimously, "Grudge him not the luxury of railing!"

Fricka, Donner, and Froh hasten to welcome the returning gods. The approach of Freia, whom the giants are bringing between them, is felt before she appears, in a subtle sweetening of the air, a simultaneous lightening of all the hearts and return of youth to the faces, which Froh's daintily expansive greeting describes.

Fricka is hurrying toward her. Fasolt interposes: Not to be touched! She still belongs to them until the ransom have been paid. Fasolt does not fall in willingly with the arrangement which shall give them the gold in place of the

THE RHINE-GOLD

woman; he has been overpersuaded by the black brother; his regret at losing Freia is so great, he tells the gods, that the treasure, if she is to be relinquished, will have to be piled so high as completely to hide the blooming maid.

"Let it be measured according to Freia's stature!" decrees Wotan, and the giants drive their great staves into the earth so that they roughly frame the figure of Freia. Helped by Loge and Froh, they begin stopping the space between with the treasure. Wotan's fastidiousness cannot endure the visible sordid details of his bargain; he turns from the sight of the incarnate rose, as she stands drooping in a noble shame, to be valued against so much gold. "Hasten with the work!" he bids them, "it sorely goes against me!" When Fafner's rough greed orders the measure to be more solidly pressed down, and he ducks spying for crevices still to be stopped with gold, Wotan turns away, soul-sick: "Humiliation burns deep in my breast!"

The Hort is exhausted, when Fafner looking for crannies exclaims, "I can still see the shining of her hair," and demands, to shut it from view, the Tarnhelm which Loge has attempted to retain. "Let it go!" commands Wotan, when Loge hesitates.

The affair, it now would seem, must be closed; but Fasolt, in his grief over the loss of the Fair one, still hovers about, peering if perchance he may still see her, and so he catches through the screen of gold the gleam of her eye, and declares that so long as the lovely glance is visible he will not renounce the woman.

"But can you not see, there is no more gold?" remonstrates Loge. Fafner, who has not failed to store in his brain what he earlier overheard, replies, "Nothing of the kind. There is a gold ring still on Wotan's finger. Give us that to stop the cranny."

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

"This ring? . . ." cries Wotan, like Alberich before him.

"Be advised," Loge says to the giants, as if in confidence. "That ring belongs to the Rhine-maidens. Wotan intends to return it to them."

But Wotan has no subterfuges or indirections of his own—not conscious ones; when he needs their aid, he uses another, as he had told Fricka. "What are you prating?" he corrects Loge; "what I have obtained with such difficulty, I shall keep without compunction for myself." Loge amuses himself with probing further the grained spot in his superior. "My promise then stands in bad case, which I made to the Rhine-daughters when they turned to me in their trouble." Wotan, with the coldness of the Pharisee's "Look thou to that," replies, "Your promise does not bind me. The ring, my capture, I shall keep."

"But you will have to lay it down with the ransom," Fafner insists.

"Ask what else you please, you shall have it; but not for the whole world will I give up the ring."

Fasolt instantly lays hands again upon Freia and draws her from behind the Hort. "Everything then stands as it stood before. Freia shall come with us now for good and all." An outcry of appeal goes up from all the gods to Wotan. He turns from them unmoved. "Trouble me not. The ring I will not give up." And the idleness of further appeal, howsoever eloquent, cannot be doubted.

But now unaccountable darkness invades the scene; from the hollow alcove in the rocks, letting down to the interior earth, breaks a bluish light; while all, breathless, watch the strange phenomenon, the upper half of a woman becomes discernible in it, wrapped in smoke-coloured veils and long black locks. It is the Spirit of the Earth, the all-knowing Erda,

THE RHINE-GOLD

whose motif describes the stately progression of natural things, and is the same as the Rhine-motif, which describes a natural thing in stately progression. She lifts a warning hand to Wotan. "Desist, Wotan, desist! Avoid the curse on the ring. . . . The possession of it will doom you to dark ruin. . . ."

Wotan, struck, inquires in awe, "Who are you, warning woman?"

The one who knows all that was, is, and shall be, she tells him; the ancestress of the everlasting world, older than time; the mother of the Norns who speak with Wotan nightly. Gravest danger has brought her to seek him in person. Let him hear and heed! The present order is passing away. There is dawning for the gods a dark day. . . . At this prophesied ruin, the music reverses the motif of ascending progression, and paints melancholy disintegration and crumbling downfall, a strain to be heard many times in the closing opera of the trilogy, when the prophecy comes to pass and the gods enter their twilight. The apparition is sinking back into the earth. Wotan beseeches it to tarry and tell him more. But with the words, "You are warned. . . . Meditate in sorrow and fear!" it vanishes. The masterful god attempts to follow, to wrest from the weird woman further knowledge. His wife and her brothers hold him back. He stands for a time still hesitating, uncertain, wrapped in thought. With sudden resolve at last he tosses the ring with the rest of the treasure, and turns heart-wholly to greet Freia returning among them, bringing back their lost youth.

While the gods are expressing tender rapture over the restoration of Freia, and she goes from one to the other receiving their caresses, Fafner spreads open a gigantic sack and in this is briskly stuffing the gold. Fasolt, otherwise preoccupied,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

had not thought to bring a sack. He attempts to stay Fafner's too active hand. "Hold on, you grasping one, leave something for me! An honest division will be best for us both!" Fafner objects, "You, amorous fool, cared more for the maid than the gold. With difficulty I persuaded you to the exchange. You would have wooed Freia without thought of division, wherefore in the division of the spoil I shall still be generous if I keep the larger half for myself." Fasolt's anger waxes great. He calls upon the gods to judge between them and divide the treasure justly. Wotan turns from his appeal with characteristic contempt. Loge, the mischief-lover, whispers to Fasolt, "Let him take the treasure, do you but reserve the ring!" Fafner has during this not been idle, but has sturdily filled his sack; the ring is on his hand. Fasolt demands it in exchange for Freia's glance. He snatches at it, Fafner defends it, and when in the wrestling which ensues Fasolt has forced it from his brother, the latter lifts his tree-trunk and strikes him dead. Having taken the ring from his hand, he leisurely proceeds to finish his packing, while the gods stand around appalled, and the air shudderingly resounds with the notes of the curse. A long, solemn silence follows. Fafner is seen, after a time, shouldering the sack, into which the whole of the glimmering Hort has disappeared, and, bowed under its weight, leaving for home.

"Dreadful," says Wotan, deeply shaken; "I now perceive to be the power of the curse!" Sorrow and fear lie crushingly upon his spirit. Erda, who warned him of the power of the curse, now proven before his eyes, warned him likewise of worse things, of old order changing, a dark day dawning for the gods. He must seek Erda, learn more, have counsel what to do. He is revolving such thoughts when Fricka, who believes all their trouble now ended, approaches him with sweet

THE RHINE-GOLD

words, and directs his eyes to the beautiful dwelling hospitably awaiting its masters. "An evil price I paid for the building!" Wotan replies heavily.

Mists are still hanging over the valley, clinging to the heights; nor have the clouds yet wholly lifted from their spirits. Donner, to clear the atmosphere, conjures a magnificent storm, by the blow of his hammer bringing about thunder and lightning. When the black cloud disperses which for a moment enveloped him and Froh on the high rock from which he directs this festival of the elements, a bright rainbow appears, forming a bridge between the rock and the castle now shining in sunset light. A bridge of music is here built, too; the tremulous weaving of it in tender and gorgeous colours is seen through the ear, and its vaulting the valley with an easy overarching spring. Froh, architect of the bridge, bids the gods walk over it fearlessly: It is light but will prove solid under their feet.

Wotan stands sunk in contemplation of the castle; his reflections, still upon the shameful circumstances of his bargain, are not happy. In the midst of them he is struck by a great thought, and recovers his courage and hardihood. The sharp, bright, resolute motif which represents his inspiration is afterward indissolubly connected with the Sword,—a sword aptly embodying his idea, which is one of defence for his castle and clan. A suggestion of his idea is contained, too, in the word which he gives to Fricka as the castle's name, when he now invites her to accompany him thither: Walhalla, Hall of the Slain in Battle, or, Hall of Heroes.

Headed by Wotan and Fricka, the gods ascend toward the bridge. Loge looks after them in mingled irony and contempt. "There they hasten to their end, who fancy themselves so firmly established in being. I am almost ashamed to have anything to do with them. . . ." And he revolves in his mind a

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

scheme for turning into elemental fire again and burning them all up, those blind gods. He is nonchalantly adding himself to their train, when from the Rhine below rises the lament of the Rhine-daughters, begging that their gold may be given back to them. Wotan pauses with his foot on the bridge: "What wail is that?" Loge enlightens him, and, at Wotan's annoyed, "Accursed nixies! Stop their importunity!" calls down to them, "You, down there in the water, what are you complaining about? Hear what Wotan bids: No longer having the gold to shine for you, make yourselves happy basking in the sunshine of this new pomp of the gods!" Loud laughter from the gods greets this sally, and they pass over the bridge, Walhalla-ward, followed by the water-nymphs' wail for their lost gold, closing with the reproach, "Only in the pleasant water-depths is truth; false and cowardly are those making merry up there!" With Walhalla and rainbow shedding a radiance around them of which we are made conscious through the delighted sense of hearing, the curtain falls.

So we lose sight of them, moving into their new house; in spite of their glory a little like the first family of the county. But while to triumphant strains they seek their serene stronghold, we know that the lines have been laid for disaster. The Ring is in the world, with its terrific power; and there is in the world one whom wrong has turned into a deadly enemy, whose soul is undividedly bent upon getting possession of the Ring, which Wotan may not himself attempt to get—stopped, if not by Erda's warning or by terror of the curse, by the fact that he finally gave it to the giants in payment of an acknowledged debt, and that his spear stands precisely for honor in relations of the sort.

THE VALKYRIE

(DIE WALKUERE)

THE VALKYRIE

(DIE WALKÜRE)

I

WOTAN'S idea, from which the abode of the gods received its name of Walhalla, had been to people his halls with hordes of heroes who should defend it from Alberich and his "army of the night."

Erda's prophecy of a dark day dawning for the gods had destroyed Wotan's peace. The craving to know more of this drove him to seek her in the depths of the earth. He cast upon her the spell of love and constrained her to speak. It does not appear that he gained from her any clear knowledge of the future; he learned chiefly, as we gather, what were the dangers besetting him. The end threatened through Alberich's forces, which, however, could not prevail against the heroic garrison of Walhalla unless Alberich should recover the Ring; through the power of the Ring he would be able to estrange the heroes from Wotan and, turning their arms against him, overcome him. "When the dark enemy of love (Alberich) in wrath shall beget a son," so ran Erda's warning, "the end of the Blessed shall not be long delayed!"

From Erda was born to Wotan a daughter, so near to her father's heart that she seemed an incarnation of his most intimate wish, his very will embodied; so part of himself she knew his unspoken thought. This was Brünnhilde (from *Brünne*,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

corslet). With eight other daughters,—born to Wotan from “the tie of lawless love,” as we learn from Fricka in her tale of wrongs—Brünnhilde, the dearest to him of all, followed her father to battle, serving him as Valkyrie. These warlike maidens hovered over the battle-field, directing the fortune of the day according to Wotan’s determination, protecting this combatant and seeing his death-doom executed upon the other; they seized the heroes as they fell, and bore them to Walhalla to form part of Wotan’s guard. From these “Slain in Battle” it was that Walhalla had its name. To make great their number, Wotan, who earlier had by laws and compacts tried to bind men to peace, now breathed into them a rough, bellicose spirit, goaded them on to quarrel and revolt.

That the end of the gods, if prophecy must fulfill itself, should not be a contemptible or pitiful one, that was Wotan’s preoccupation,—to save, if nothing more, the dignity of the Eternals; with this in view, to keep Alberich from recovering the Ring, by which he might work such really disgusting havoc. The Ring was in the possession of Fafner, who had turned himself into a dragon, and in a lonely forest-girt cave guarded it and the rest of the treasure of the Nibelungen, for the sake of which he had killed Fasolt, his brother. Wotan, as we have seen, could not wrest from him the Ring which he himself had given in payment for the building of Walhalla: for the honour of his spear he must not attempt it. Alberich, not bound as he was to keep his hands off it, must infallibly and indefatigably be devising means to regain possession of it. It was plain to Wotan that he must find some one to do that which he himself could not, some one, who, unprompted by him, should yet accomplish his purposes, some one free as he was not. This tool who was yet not to be his tool, since a god’s good faith demanded that neither directly nor indirectly he

THE VALKYRIE

should meddle with the Ring, Wotan supposed he had created for himself in Siegmund, born to him, with a twin sister, Sieglinde, of a human mother. This boy with whom, in human disguise, under the names of Wälse and Wolf,—Wolf for his enemies, Wälse for his kindred,—he lived in the wild woods, he reared in a spirit of lawlessness, wild courage, disregard of the gods. We must suppose it to have been for the sake of preventing association with women from softening his disposition that, while Siegmund was a child, Wotan, sacrificing to the hardness of fibre it was his object to produce, permitted the catastrophe which deprived the boy of mother and sister. Returning home from a day's wild chase,—hunters and hunted alike human,—father and son found their dwelling burned to the ground, the mother slain, the sister gone. They lived for years together after that, in the woods, always in conflict with enemies, of whom their peculiar daring and strength raised them an infinite number. In time, when the son was well grown, Wotan forsook him, left him to complete his development alone, under the harsh training of the calamities and sorrows fatally incident to the temper and manner of viewing things which that father had bred in him. The lad received the usage of a sword in the forging, extremes of furnace and ice-brook. So he stood at last, Wotan's pupil and finished instrument, an embodied defiance of the law and the gods, proper to do the work which the law of the gods forbade. Some defence against the wrath which he must inevitably rouse, his father could not but feel impelled to provide, yet could he not, without violating the honour which in his simple-minded way he was striving to preserve intact, give it to him directly. He could not bestow upon him outright a *Sieges-schwert*—magical sword which ensured victory. But he placed one where the young man should find it.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

The piece opens with the blustering music of a storm, whose violence is rapidly dying down.

The curtain rises upon the interior of Hunding's very primitive dwelling, built about a great ash-tree whose trunk stands in view. Siegmund, predestined to be ever at strife with his fellow-man, in circumstances of peculiar distress seeks the shelter of Hunding's roof. We see him burst into the empty hall, staggering and panting. His spear and shield have splintered beneath the enemies' strokes; deprived of arms, he has been forced to flee; he has been so hotly pursued, so beaten by the storm, that upon reaching this refuge he can no more than drop beside the hearth and lie there, exhausted.

It is his sister's house to which fate has led him, where, ill-starred and unhappy like himself, this other child of Wälse's lives, in subjection to Hunding, her lord, who has come by her through some obscure commerce, and to whom she is no more than part of the household baggage.

Hearing the rustle of Siegmund's entrance, Sieglinde hurries in, and, beholding a stranger outstretched upon the ground, stops short to observe him. The strength of the prostrate body cannot fail to strike her. At his gasped call for water, she hurries to fetch it from the spring out of doors. His perishing need is shown in the devotion with which he drains the horn she hands him. His eyes, as he returns it, are arrested by her face, and dwell upon it with fearless lingering scrutiny—while the strain for the first time trembles upon the air which, singing the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde, is to caress our hearing so many times more. His fatigue has magically vanished. He asks to whom he owes the refreshment afforded him. When, at her reply and request that he shall await Hunding's return, he refers to himself as an unarmed and wounded guest, she eagerly inquires of his wounds. But he jumps up, shaking

THE VALKYRIE

off all thought of wounds or weariness. His succinct narrative of the circumstances which have brought him to her hearth, he brings to a close: "But faster than I vanished from the mob of my pursuers, my weariness has vanished from me. Night lay across my eyelids,—the sun now smiles upon me anew!" She offers the guest mead to drink, at his prayer tasting it before him. As he returns the emptied horn, again his eyes dwell upon her face, with an emotion ever increasing. Both gaze in simple undisguised intensity of interest. There is a long moment's silence between them. Then, at the love he feels surging in his bosom, remembrance comes to Siegmund of what he is,—a man so ill-fated that it may well be feared his ill-fortune shall infect those with whom he comes into contact. "You have relieved an ill-fated man," he warns her, his voice unsteady with the pang of this recognition, "may his wish turn ill-fortune from you! Sweetly have I rested. . . . I will now fare further on my way!" As he turns to the door she detains him with the quick cry: "What pursues you, that you should thus flee?" He answers, slowly and sadly: "Misfortune pursues me wherever I flee. Misfortune meets me wherever I go. From you, woman, may it remain afar! I turn from you my footsteps and my glance." His hand is on the latch, when her sharp involuntary exclamation stops him: "Stay, then! You cannot bring sorrow into a house where sorrow is already at home!" Deeply shaken by her words, he fixes his eyes questioningly upon her. She meets them for a moment, then drops her own, sad and half-ashamed. The motif of the Wälsungen well expresses the nobility in misfortune of these poor children of Wälse. Siegmund returns quietly to the hearth: "Wehwalt is my name for myself. I will await Hunding." (*Weh*: woe, sorrow, calamity, pain; *walten*: to govern. *Wehwalt*: lord of sorrows.) There is no

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

further exchange of words while they wait, but in complete unashamed absorption they gaze at each other, and the music tells beautifully how it is within their hearts. Hunding's horn is heard. (*Hund*: hound. It was, as we learn later, this amiable personage's custom to hunt his enemies with a pack of dogs.) Startled from her trance, Sieglinde listens, and hastens to open. Hunding appears in the doorway, a dark figure, in helmet, shield and spear. At sight of the stranger, he questions his wife with a look. "I found the man on the hearth, spent with weariness. Necessity brings him to our house," she explains. There is some sternness apparently in Hunding's tone as he inquires: "Have you offered him refreshment?" for Siegmund, rash and instantaneous in the woman's defence, speaks, hard on the heels of her answer: "I have to thank her for shelter and drink. Will you therefore chide your wife?" But Hunding, at his best in this moment, without retort welcomes the guest: "Sacred is my hearth, sacred to you be my house!" and orders his wife to set forth food for them. Catching Sieglinde's eyes unconsciously fixed upon Siegmund, he glances quickly from one to the other, and is struck by the resemblance between them; but the luminous look they have in common he defines, with the constitutional dislike of his kind to that freer, more generous type: "The selfsame glittering serpent shines out of his eyes!" He inquires of the circumstances which have brought this stranger to his house, and finding that Siegmund has no idea whither his wild flight has led him, introduces himself with a dignity which commends to us, while he is doing it, the narrow-natured, unimaginative man: "He whose roof covers you and whose house shelters you,—Hunding your host is called. If you should from here turn your footsteps eastward, there, in rich courts, dwell kinsmen, protectors of Hunding's honour!"

THE VALKYRIE

They seat themselves at table; the host asks for this guest's name, and as Siegmund, plunged in thought, does not at once reply, Hunding, remarking the interest with which his wife waits for the stranger's words, sardonically encourages him: "If you are in doubt about trusting me, yet give the information to the lady here. See how eagerly she questions you!" And Sieglinde, too deeply interested, verily, to mind the thrust, proceeds further to give it point: "Guest, I should be glad to know who you are!" Whereupon Siegmund, as little constrained by the husband's presence as the wife herself, with his eyes upon hers, addressing her directly, tells his story: of Wolf, his father, of the twin sister lost to him in infancy, the enmity of the Neidingen clan, who in the absence of the men burned down their house, slew the mother, abducted the sister; of his life in the forest with Wolf, their numberless foes and perpetual warfare. Hunding recalls vaguely wild dark tales he has heard of the mighty pair, the Wölfinen. The disappearance of his father, Siegmund further relates, from whom he had been separated in a fight, and whom he could never, long though he sought, find again, nor any trace of him save an empty wolf-skin. "Then,—" follow the strange cruel fortunes this father had arranged for him, "then I was impelled to forsake the woods, I was impelled to seek men and women. As many as I found, and wherever I found them,—whether I sought for friend, or wooed for woman, always I met with denial, ill-fortune lay upon me!" With ingenuous wonder he describes the natural fruits of the education bestowed on him by Wotan: "What I thought right, others held to be wrong; what had ever seemed to me abominable, others considered with favour. I fell into feud wherever I was, anger fell upon me wherever I went. If I reached out toward happiness, I never failed to bring about calamity!

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

For that reason it is I named myself Wehwalt, I command calamity alone!"

Hunding has listened attentively. His small superstitious heart has taken alarm. "Fortune was not fond of you, who appointed for you so miserable a lot. The man can hardly welcome you with gladness, whom, a stranger to him, you approach as a guest." With a vivacity which cannot have been the common habit of her intercourse with her husband, Sieglinde pronounces judgment aloud and at once upon this ungenerous speech and speaker, whose prudence must certainly, in contrast with the Wälsung's frank magnificence of courage, seem to her unspeakably bourgeois: "Only cowards fear one going his way unarmed and alone!" And turning again eagerly to the guest: "Tell further, guest, how you lately lost your arms in battle!" Siegmund as eagerly satisfies her. The circumstances which he describes further exemplify the disposition fostered in him by his father, his non-recognition or acceptance of established law and custom, however sacred, his pursuit of an ideal unattached to any convention: He had lost his arms in the attempt to defend a damsel against her own immediate family, bent upon marrying her against her inclination. He had slain her brothers, whereupon the maiden, as another perhaps would have foreseen, had cast herself upon their bodies, sorrow annulling her resentment. He had stood over her, shielding her from the vengeance of her kindred pressing around. His armour had been shattered; the girl lay dead on her dead brothers. Wounded and weaponless, he had been chased by the infuriate horde. "Now you know, inquiring woman," he closes his narrative, "why I do not bear the name of Friedmund!" (*Frieden*: peace.) With this simple sally, whose bitterness is not enough to crumple the serene forehead, he rises and walks to the hearth, striding to

THE VALKYRIE

the noble march-measure we know as the motif of the heroism of the Wälsungen,—proud in its first bars, with Siegmund's pride, tender in the last, with Sieglinde's tenderness, loftily mournful throughout.

"I know a wild race of men," now speaks Hunding, "to whom nothing is holy of all that is revered by others; hated are they of all men—and of me!" He then reveals how he himself had that day been called out for vengeance with his clan against this officious champion of damsels. He had arrived too late for action, and returning home, behold, discovers the fugitive miscreant in his own house! As he granted the stranger hospitality for the night, his house shall shelter him for that length of time; but "with strong weapons arm yourself to-morrow," he grimly warns him; "it is the day I choose for combat; you shall pay me a price for the dead!" When Sieglinde in alarm places herself between the two men, Hunding orders her roughly: "Out of the room! Loiter not here! Prepare my night-drink and wait for me to go to rest!" Siegmund, smothering his anger, stands in contemptuous composure beside the hearth; his eyes frankly follow every movement of the woman as she prepares Hunding's drink. On her way out of the room, she pauses at the threshold of the inner chamber, and seeking Siegmund's eyes with her own, tries by a long significant glance to direct his glance to a spot in the ash-tree. The sword-motif, distinct and sharp, accompanies her look. Hunding, becoming aware of her lingering, with a peremptory gesture orders her again to be gone; and gathering up his own armour, with a warning to the Wölfe that on the morrow he will strike home,—let him have a care!—withdraws, audibly bolting the door behind him.

Left alone, Siegmund lies down beside the dying fire. To remove himself during the night as far as possible from Hund-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

ing's reach is not the solution suggesting itself naturally to him. Yet there he stands, pledged to meet an enemy, and not a weapon to his hand of offence or defence. The difficulty of his position is certainly as great as could be, and, reaching the full consciousness of it, he recalls to mind that his father had promised him a sword, which he should find in the hour of his greatest need. "Unarmed I am fallen in the house of the enemy; here I rest, devoted to his vengeance. A woman I have seen, gloriously fair. . . . She to whom my longing draws me, who with a rapturous charm constrains me, is held in thralldom by the man who mocks my unarmed condition. . . ." Could need, indeed, be greater? With the whole strength of that need, in a cry, long, urgent, fit to pierce the walls of Walhalla, he calls upon his father for the promised sword: "Wälse! Wälse! Where is your sword? . . ."

A flame leaps from the embers and illuminates the ash-tree, bringing into view, at the spot Sieglinde had indicated to him with her eyes, a sword-hilt. But though his eyes are caught by the glitter, he does not recognise it for what it is; he watches it, without moving, as it shines in the firelight, and, lover-like, soon lapsing into undivided dreaming of the "flower-fair woman," plays tenderly with the conceit of the gleam on the ash-tree being the trace of her last bright glance. Forgetting his swordlessness and altogether unpromising plight, he goes on weaving poetry about her until the fire is quite out and he so nearly dozes that when a white form comes gliding through the door bolted by Hunding, he does not stir until addressed: "Guest, are you asleep?"

Sieglinde has mixed narcotic herbs in her husband's drink, and bids the stranger make use of the night to provide for his safety. "Let me advise you of a weapon. . . . Oh, might you obtain it! The most splendid of heroes I must call you,

THE VALKYRIE

for it is destined to the strongest alone." And she relates how at the marriage-feast of Hunding, while the men drank, and the woman who "unconsulted had been offered him for wife by ignoble traffickers" sat sadly apart, a stranger appeared, an elderly man in grey garb, whose hat-brim concealed one of his eyes. But the brilliant beam of the other eye created terror in the bystanders,—all save herself, in whom it aroused an aching longing, sorrow and comfort in equal measure. The sword in his hand he swung, and drove into the ash-tree up to the hilt, leaving it there, a prize to whomsoever should be able to draw it out. The men present had all made the essay in vain; guests coming and going since then had tried, equally without success. "There in silence waits the sword." There in the ash-tree. "Then I knew," Sieglinde concludes, "who it was had come to me in my sorrow. I know, too, who it is alone can conquer the sword. Oh, might I find him here and now, that friend; might he, from the unknown, come to me, most wretched of women! All I have ever suffered of cruel woe, all the shame and indignity under which I have bowed,—sweetest amends would be made for it all! All I ever lost, all I ever mourned, I should have recovered it all,—if I might find that supreme friend, if my arm might clasp that hero!" Siegmund, to whom it could not occur for the fraction of a second to doubt his strength to draw any sword from any tree, at these words catches her impetuously to his breast: "The friend now clasps you, fairest of women, for whom weapon and woman were meant! Hot in my breast burns the oath which, noble one, weds me to you!" and, in her very strain: "All I ever yearned for, I met in you! In you I found all I ever lacked. If you suffered ignominy and I endured pain, if I was outlawed and you were dishonoured, a joyful revenge now calls to us happy ones! I laugh aloud in a holy elation, as I hold you,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

radiant one, embraced, as I feel the throbbing of your heart!"

The great door of the hall, silently, without apparent reason, swings wide open, like a great curious eye unclosing to watch this beautiful marvel of their love, expanded so suddenly, like a huge aloe-flower. It lets in a flood of moonlight, and the glimmering vision of the vapourous green-lit nocturnal Spring-world. "Who went out? . . . Who came in?" cries Sieglinde, starting in alarm. "No one went," Siegmund reassures her, "but some one came: See, the Spring laughing in the room!" And he pours forth poetry of adorable inspiration, in explanation of the singular action of the door: Spring was outside, and Love, his sister, inside; Spring burst open the severing door, and now, brother and sister, Love and the Spring, are met!

It is touching, the capacity for happiness the two have accumulated in the long, thwarted years. An ecstatic joy marks this hour of forgetting all the world outside themselves; the love-music is all of a fine free sustained rapture. One poignant and subtle and profound thing she says to him: "Foreign and unrelated to me seemed until now everything I saw, hostile everything which approached me. As if I had never known them were always the things that came to me. . . . But you I knew at once, clearly and distinctly; my eye no sooner beheld you, than you belonged to me; and all that lay concealed within my breast, the thing which I verily am, bright as the day it rose to the surface; like a ringing sound it smote my ear, when in the cold lonesome strange world for the first time I beheld my Friend!"

Seated in the light of the full moon, they have freedom at last each to pore over the other's winning beauty. She is struck, fondly peering into his features, with the sense of hav-

THE VALKYRIE

ing seen him before; and trying to think when and where reaches the assurance that it was on the surface of the pool which reflected her own image. Again, when he speaks, she is struck by the assurance that she has heard his voice before. She thinks, for a moment, that it was in childhood, . . . but corrects the impression by a second: she has heard it recently, when the echo in the woods gave back her own voice. His luminous eyes she has seen before: thus shone the glance of the grey guest at the wedding-feast, whom his daughter recognised by that token. Earnestly she asks this other guest: "Is your name in very truth Wehwalt?" "That is no longer my name since you love me!" he replies exuberantly, "I command now the sublimest joys! . . . Do you call me as you wish me to be called: I will take my name from you!" "And was your father indeed Wolf?" "A Wolf he was to cowardly foxes. But he whose eye shone with as proud an effulgence as, Glorious One, does yours, Wälse was his name!" Beside herself with joy, Sieglinde springs up: "If Wälse was your father—if you are a Wälsung, for you it was he drove his sword into the tree-trunk. Let me give you the name by which I love you: Siegmund shall you be called!" Siegmund leaps to seize the sword-handle: "Siegmund is my name, and Siegmund am I! (*Sieg*: victory.) Let this sword bear witness, which fearlessly I seize! Wälse promised me that I should find it in my greatest need. I grasp it now. . . ." Very characteristically, this greatest need, as he feels it, is not the need of a weapon with which to defend his life against Hunding; it is, in his soaring words: "Highest need of a holiest love, devouring need of a love full of longing, burns bright in my breast, drives me onward to deeds and to death. . . . Nothing! Nothing! So do I name you, sword! (*Noth*: need. *Nothung*: sword-in-need.) Nothing! Nothing! Out of the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

scabbard, to me!" With a mighty tug he draws it forth and holds it before the marvelling eyes of Sieglinde: "Siegmond the Walsung stands before you, woman! As a wedding-gift he brings you this sword. Thus he wooes the fairest of women; from the enemy's house thus he leads you forth. Far from here follow him now, out in the laughing house of the Spring. There Nothung, the sword, shall protect you, when Siegmund lies overthrown, in the power of love!" "If you are Siegmund," cries the woman, "I am Sieglinde, who have so longed for you! Your own sister you have won at the same time as the sword!" Siegmund is given no pause by this revelation. At the realisation of this double dearness, the joy flares all the higher of the lawless pupil of Wotan. "Bride and sister are you to your brother. Let the blood of the Walsungen flourish!" And with arms entertwined, forth they take their madly exulting hearts out into the "laughing house of the Spring."

II

The rising of the curtain for the second act reveals a wild mountain-pass where Wotan, in a vast good-humour, is giving instructions to Brünnhilde with regard to the impending meeting between the injured husband and the abductor of his wife. Victory is allotted to Siegmund; Hunding, "let them choose him to whom he belongs; he is not wanted in Walhalla!" In Wotan's complacency the satisfaction speaks of this thought: At last, at last, a change of fortune,—victory to the Walsung, after a trial of his mettle so severe and prolonged it must have broken a spirit less admirably tempered. The Valkyrie, in delight over the charge to her, breaks into her jubilant war-cry, checking herself as she perceives Fricka approaching in the chariot drawn by rams, and judges from the goddess's merciless

THE VALKYRIE

urging of the panting beasts that she comes for a *Zank*, a "scold," with her husband. "The old storm!" murmurs Wotan, at sight of his liege lady dismounting and coming toward him with ultramajestic gait, "the old trouble! But I must stand and face her!" The scene following has a touch of comical in its resemblance to domestic scenes among less high-born characters, as, for instance, when Fricka says, "Look me in the eye! Do not think to deceive me!" or "Do you imagine that you can deceive me, who night and day have been hard upon your heels?" Fricka, the guardian of marriage, has come to demand justice for Hunding, vengeance upon the "insolently criminal couple." "What," asks Wotan, an unguarded and tender indulgence in his tone, "what have they done that is so evil, the couple brought into loving union by the Spring? . . ." "Do you feign not to understand me?" is in effect Fricka's return; "for the holy vow of marriage, the deeply insulted, I raise my voice in complaint. . . ." "I regard that vow as unholy," says Wotan,—and the source is flagrant from which Siegmund has drawn his unpopular rules of conduct,—"which binds together those who do not love each other." But the case in question, Fricka protests, is not one simply of broken marriage-vow, "When—when was it ever known that brother and sister might stand toward each other in the nuptial relation?" "This day you have known it!" the worthy teacher of Siegmund meets her; and, all his paternal affection finding its imprudent way into his accents: "That those two love each other is clear to you. Wherefore, take honest advice: if blessed comfort is to reward your blessing, do you bless, laughing with love, the union of Siegmund and Sieglinde!" Upon this, as is hardly unnatural, the furious storm breaks over the indiscreet god; a storm of reproach, in part for personal wrongs, which the outraged goddess details, in part for his failure as

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

ruler of the earth to maintain law and right, to observe the boundaries established by himself. At the end of it, rather feebly, he tells her, in defence of his position, the thing which he had not confided to her before, plain enough indication that the goddess, to win whom he had given an eye, is not of his bosom's counsel any more. "This know! There is need of a hero who without aid from the gods should cast off the law of the gods. Such a one alone can compass the act which, however much the gods may need it done, no god can himself do." "And what may the great thing be," the dull august shrew inquires, "that a hero can do which the gods cannot, through whose grace alone a hero acts? . . . What makes men brave? Through your inspiration alone they are strong. With new falsehoods you are trying to elude me, but this Walsung you shall not be able to save. Through him I strike at you, for it is through you alone he defies me!" "In wild sorrows," Wotan ventures, with deep emotion, "he grew up, by himself. My protection never helped him!" "Then do not protect him to-day!" she pursues, hatefully righteous, "take away from him the sword you gave him." "The sword? . . ." Her suggestion is a very sword for Wotan's heart. "Yes, the sword, strong with a charm, which you bestowed on your son." "Sieg-mund conquered it for himself in his need." The deep strain here shudders out its passion of repressed resentment and grief, which after this darkly underlines Wotan's misery. "You created the need, as you created the sword," she follows him up with clear-sighted accusation, almost voluble. "For him you drove it into the tree-trunk. You promised him the goodly weapon. Will you deny that it was your own stratagem which guided him to the spot where he should find it?" The effect of her words upon Wotan—to whom this mirror held up to him reveals the weakness of his scheme to create a hero who

THE VALKYRIE

should act for himself, unprompted, against the gods, yet in the very manner the case of the gods demanded—still increases his wife's assurance. "What do you require?" asks Wotan at last, in gloom, heart-struck. "That you should sever from the Wälsung!" "Let him go his way!" Wotan acquiesces, smothered by this horrible, yet so clear, necessity. "But you, protect him not, when the avenger calls him out to fight!" "I—protect him not!" "Turn from him the Valkyrie!" "Let the Valkyrie determine as she will!" "Nay, she solely carries out your wishes. . . . Forbid her the victory of Siegmund!" "I cannot deal him defeat!" protests Wotan, in anguish, "he found my sword!" "Withdraw the charm from the sword. Let it snap in the knave's hand. Let the adversary behold him without defence! . . . Here comes your warlike maid. . . . This day must her shield protect the sacred honour of your wife. My honour demands the fall of the Wälsung. Have I Wotan's oath?" The unhappy god casts himself upon a rocky seat, in helpless loathing, and the terrible consent falls forced from his lips: "Take the oath!" Fricka, with proud tread turning from him to remount her chariot, stops to address Brünnhilde: "The Father of Armies is waiting for you. Let him tell you how he has appointed the fortune of battle."

Wotan sits with his head in his hands, like any humblest mortal hard put to it. It has been brought home to him sharply enough that the thing is not to be done, on the accomplishment of which he had so fondly built. It is not that an angry wife has interfered; it is that her argument has been sound, and that for the sake of his world a god cannot trespass against the laws he has himself made for it. It is, in fact, that kings less than others can do as they choose; that if in this he should follow his desire, it would, as Fricka has pointed out,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

"be all over with the everlasting gods!" But, to sacrifice the Walsung, "brought up in wild sorrows" for this very purpose which is to be relinquished; the Walsung who in his young life has had but one draught at the cup of joy! . . . It is no wonder that Wotan utters his lamentation: "Oh, divine ignominy! Oh, woful disgrace! Distress of the gods! Distress of the gods! Immeasurable wrath! Eternal regret! The saddest am I among all!"

The darling of his heart, Brünnhilde, torn by his cry, casts from her all her Valkyrie accoutrements, and, woman merely and daughter, kneels at his feet, presses her cheek against him, begging to be trusted: "Confide in me! I am true to you. See, Brünnhilde pleads!"

He hesitates, while sorely yearning for the comfort. "If I utter it aloud, shall I not be loosing the grasp of my will?" "To Wotan's will you speak in speaking to me. Who am I, if not your will?"

With the assurance to himself: "With myself solely I take counsel, in talking to you, . . ." he relates to Brünnhilde all the events which have brought about this intolerable position, a long story: the first mistake in trusting Loge; the mistake in possessing himself of the Ring; what he has since done to obviate the effect of his mistakes, and done, as is now shown, in vain. "How did I cunningly seek to deceive myself! So easily Fricka exposed my fallacies! To my deepest shame she looked through me. I must yield to her will." "You will take away then the victory from Siegmund?" "I touched Alberich's Ring," Wotan replies, "covetously I held the gold. The curse which I fled from, flees not from me! What I love I must desert, murder what from all time I have held dear, treacherously betray him who trusts me! . . ." Again, it is no wonder his tormented soul breaks forth in lamentation,

THE VALKYRIE

The mighty groan of Wotan has, if ever groan had, adequate cause, and his longing for "the end! the end!" With grim comfort he recalls at this moment that the end cannot be far, —not if there be truth in the prophecy of Erda: "When the dark enemy of love shall in wrath beget a son, the end of the Immortals will not be long delayed." For the loveless Alberich, as Wotan knows, has by means of gold won the favour of a woman, and the "fruit of hatred" is on its way toward the light. "Take my blessing, son of the Nibelung!" cries Wotan in his dark mood; "the thing which sickens me with loathing, I bestow it upon you for an inheritance: the empty splendour of the gods!"

"Oh, tell me, what shall your child do?" entreats the daughter, shaken by the sight of her father's passion. "Fight straightforwardly for Fricka," he orders her, in the excess of bitterness; "what she has chosen I choose likewise; of what good to me is a will of my own?" "Oh, retract that word!" she beseeches, "you love Siegmund. . . . Never shall your discordant dual directions enlist me against him. For your own sake, I know it, I will protect the Walsung!" At this first intimation of rebellion in his child,—this incipient treachery of his own will,—Wotan becomes stern, lays down his command irrevocably, with threats of crushing retribution if this child of his shall dare to palter with his expressed will. "Keep a watch over yourself! Hold yourself in strong constraint! Put forth all your valour in the fight! . . . Have well in mind what I command: Siegmund is to fall! This be the Valkyrie's task!"

Brünnhilde gazes after him in wonder and fear as he storms up over the rocky ascent out of sight: "I never saw Sieg-vater like that!" Sadly she resumes her armour, woe-begone at the thought of the Walsung, given over to death. Becoming aware

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

of the approach of Siegmund and Sieglinde, she hastens from sight.

Sieglinde enters, fleeing in distraction from Siegmund, anxious in pursuit. The presumption of those seeing her action without understanding her words, is commonly, I suppose, that remorse has overtaken her for her breach of the moral law. Remorse, indeed, has assailed her, but not for having followed the "luminous brother." It is for having ever belonged to Hunding, whom she neither loved nor was loved by. The new sentiment of love so completely possessing her places her former union in the light of unspeakable pollution, and she adjures the "noble one" to depart from the accursed who brings him such a dowry of shame. Siegmund with sturdy tenderness assures her that whatever shame there is shall be washed away in the blood of him who is responsible for it, whose heart Nothing shall cleave. An insanity of terror seizes Sieglinde at the thought of the meeting between the two men, the vision besetting her of Siegmund torn by Hunding's dogs, against the multitude of which his sword is of no use. At the picture painted by her delirium of Siegmund's fall, shocked as if at the actual sight of it, she sinks unconscious in his arms.

Having ascertained that she has not ceased to breathe, almost glad perhaps for her of this respite from self-torment, he lets her gently down on to the ground, and seats himself so as to make an easy resting-place for her head.

Thus the Valkyrie finds them. At her approach, three solemn notes are heard which intimate as if something awful and not to be escaped—whose solemn awfulness consists in great part of the fact that it cannot be escaped,—like Fate. "Siegmund!" she calls him, with firm voice, "look upon me! I am that one whom in short space you must follow!" Siegmund lifts his eyes from the sleeping face upon which they have

THE VALKYRIE

been fondly brooding, and beholds the shining apparition. "Who are you, tell me, appearing to me, so beautiful and grave?" "Only those about to die can see my face. He who beholds me must depart from the light of life. On the field of battle I appear to the noble alone. He who becomes aware of me, has been singled out for my capture!" Siegmund gazes quietly and long and inquiringly into her eyes, and: "The hero who must follow you, whither do you take him?" "To the Father of Battles who has elected you, I shall lead you. To Walhalla you shall follow me." "In the hall of Walhalla shall I find none but the Father of Battles?" "The glorious assemblage of departed heroes shall gather around you companionably, with high and holy salutation." "Shall I in Walhalla find Wälse, my own father?" "The Wälsung shall find his father there." "Shall I in Walhalla be greeted gladly by a woman?" "Divine wish-maidens there hold sway; the daughter of Wotan shall trustily proffer you drink." "Unearthly fair are you; I recognise the holy child of Wotan; but one thing tell me, you Immortal! Shall the bride and sister accompany the brother? Shall Siegmund clasp Sieglinde there?" "The air of earth she still must breathe. Siegmund shall not find Sieglinde there!" The hero bends over the unconscious woman, kisses her softly on the brow, and turns quietly again to Brünnhilde: "Then bear my greeting to Walhalla! Greet for me Wotan, greet for me Wälse and all the heroes; greet for me likewise the benign wish-maidens: I will not follow you to them!"

In this strangely impressive and moving dialogue, the Brünnhilde-part is upborne on the stately, high and cold Walhalla theme; the Siegmund-part gives over and over one urgent heartfelt questioning phrase, filled with human yearning and sorrow: the motif of love and death. "Where Sieglinde lives

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

in joy or sorrow, there will Siegmund likewise abide, . . .” he pronounces. When he is informed that he has no choice but to follow, that he is to fall through Hunding, that its virtue has been withdrawn from his sword, justly incensed, he declares that if this be true,—if he, shame to him! who forged for him the sword, allotted him ignominy in place of victory, he will not go to Walhalla, Hella shall hold him fast!

“So little do you care for eternal joy?” the Valkyrie asks wistfully; “all in all to you is the poor woman who, tired and full of trouble, lies strengthless in your lap? Nothing beside do you deem of high value?” Inexpressibly moved at the manifestation before her of the warmth and depth of this human affection, she begs him to place his wife under her protection. He replies passionately that no one while he lives shall touch the Stainless One, that if he must indeed die, he will first slay her in her sleep. Brünnhilde, in great emotion, begs still more urgently, “Entrust her to me, for the sake of the pledge of love which she took from you in joy!” But Siegmund, all the more firmly fixed in his resolve, lifts his sword, and grimly offering Nothung two lives at one blow, swings it above the sleeping woman. The Valkyrie at this can no longer keep in bounds the surging flood of her compassion: “Hold, Wälsung!” she restrains his arm, “Sieglinde shall live, and with her Siegmund! . . . I change about the doom of battle. To you, Siegmund, I apportion blessed victory. . . .” With injunctions to place his trust in the sword and the Valkyrie, bidding him farewell till they shall meet on the field, she disappears. Siegmund, with heart restored to gladness, bends over Sieglinde again; listens to her breathing and studies her face, now smiling, as he sees, in quiet sleep. “Sleep on!” he speaks to her, “till the battle has been fought and peace shall rejoice you!”

THE VALKYRIE

Hunding's horn has already been heard, calling out the adversary. Siegmund lays Sieglinde gently down, and, Nothing in hand, rushes to the encounter. A storm has been gathering, a cloud has settled over the mountain-tops. Sieglinde, left alone, murmurs in her sleep. Her broken sentences reveal her dream: She is a child again and the scene is reenacted to her of the conflagration which ended her life in the forest with father and mother and twin. She starts awake in affright, calling Siegmund, and finds herself alone. She hears her husband's horn and his call to Wehwalt to stand and meet him. She hears Siegmund's arrogant reply. She cannot see them for the black storm-scud, but calls on them to stop, to kill her first. A flash of lightning shows Hunding and Siegmund fighting on a high point of the rocky pass. Sieglinde is rushing toward them, when a sudden glare blinds her. In the light, Brünnhilde is seen hard at Siegmund's side, defending him with her shield. "Strike home, Siegmund! Trust to the victorious sword!" Siegmund raises his sword for a death-blow to Hunding, when a fiery beam drops through the storm-cloud; in the red glow of it is distinguished the form of Wotan at Hunding's side, holding his spear between the combatants. His voice is heard, terrible: "Back from the spear! To pieces, the sword!" Nothing snaps against the spear, and, run through the body by his adversary, Siegmund falls. Sieglinde hears his dying sigh—the strong heart stops on a brief snatch, pathetic, of the motif of the heroism of the Wälsungen—She drops to earth, stunned. In the gloom, Brünnhilde, who has retreated before the angry father's spear, is seen lifting Sieglinde and hurrying off: "To horse! that I may save you!"

Long and mournfully Wotan gazes upon the fallen Siegmund—best-beloved perhaps of all the Wagner heroes. Taking account suddenly of the presence of Hunding, "Begone, slave!"

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

he orders, "kneel before Fricka, inform her that Wotan's spear has taken vengeance of that which brought mockery upon her! . . . Begone! . . . Begone! . . ." But at the gesture with which the command is emphasised, Hunding drops dead, crushed out of life by the god's contempt.

Abruptly recalled to the thought of his child's contumacy, Wotan starts up in terrific wrath: "But Brünnhilde! Woe to that offender! Dreadful shall be the punishment meted to her audacity, when my horse overtakes her in her flight!" Amid lightning and thunder, aptly symbolising the state of his temper, the god vanishes from sight.

III

The third act shows the scene, a high rocky peak rising from among great pine-trees, where the Valkyries assemble for their return together to the hall of Wotan. On the clouds they come riding, each with a dead warrior laid across her steed. Over the neighing and hoof-beats, the music develops of a lightly thundering cavalry-charge, suggestive of the rocking in the saddle of horsemen borne over billowing expanses—glorious with the glory of the hosts which fancy sees among the crimson and gold banners of the sunset. The eight are at last arrived; their war-cries, their hard laughter, and the shrill neighing of the battle-steeds mingle in harsh harmony. The shrieks of an autumn gale, exulting in its freedom to drive the waves mountain-high and scatter all the leaves of the forest, have the same quality of wildness and force and glee. The steel-corseleted figures clustered on the peak make one think a little of gleaming dragon-flies seen in summer, swarming as they do around some point of mysterious interest. The laughter of the Valkyries is for grim jests they exchange over the conduct

THE VALKYRIE

of their horses, who fall to fighting with one another, because the dead warriors on their backs were enemies in life. Brünnhilde only is wanting, to complete their number, but they dare not start for Walhalla without her, lest Walvater, not seeing his favourite, should receive them with a frown. They are amazed, when they finally see her coming, to descry on the back of her horse no warrior, but a woman—amazed, likewise, at the wild speed of Grane's flight, and to see him stagger and drop on reaching the goal. They hurry to Brünnhilde's assistance. She comes in, breathless with terror and haste, supporting Sieglinde. Wotan, she informs the wondering sisters, is hot in pursuit of her. She begs one of them to keep lookout for him from the top of the peak. The black storm-cloud on which he rides is perceived sweeping toward them from the north. To the questioning Valkyries Brünnhilde gives in quick outline the story of her disobedience, and implores their help to save Sieglinde,—for the Wälsungen all Wotan has threatened with destruction. She conjures them, too, to conceal herself, who has not the hardihood to face her father in the extremity of his indignation. But the sisters are appalled at the revelation of her misdeed, and no less at the suggestion that they should join in her act of rebellion. Her prayer for the loan of one of their horses on which the woman may escape, meets with obtuse looks, headshakes, uncompromising denial. She is appealing urgently, hurriedly, to one after the other, when Sieglinde who, stony, death-struck, dazed with grief, has appeared unconscious, up to this moment, of all taking place around her, stops her, stating dully that there is no need to trouble about her, since her only wish is to die. She indeed reproaches Brünnhilde for her care, and bids her now, if she is not to curse her for their flight, to end her life by a thrust of the sword. In the next moment the face of this same

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

woman sheds the very radiance of joy: the Valkyrie has revealed to her that of her a Wälsung shall be born. Then, oh, "Save me, you valiant one!" she cries. "Save my child! Protect me, you maidens, with your mightiest protection! Save me! Save the mother!" She kneels to them. The cool-blooded spinsters are moved by this, but not to the point of braving Wotan's ire. "Then fly in haste, and fly alone!" Brünnhilde with sudden resolve bids Sieglinde: "I will remain behind and draw upon me, delaying him, Wotan's anger." "In what direction shall I go?" asks the woman eagerly. Eastward, one of the sisters tells her, lies a forest. Fafner there, in the shape of a dragon, guards the treasure of the Nibelungen. An unsuitable place for a helpless woman, yet one where she will be safe from Wotan, for the god, it has been observed, shuns it. "Away then to eastward," Brünnhilde instructs Sieglinde; "with undaunted courage bear every trial. Hunger and thirst, thorns and stony roads—do you laugh at want and sorrow, for one thing know, and keep it ever in mind: the most exalted hero in the world, O woman, shall be born of you!" A great melodious phrase describes him, the future Siegfried, as if with one magnificent stroke outlining a form of heroic beauty and valour. Brünnhilde gives Sieglinde the pieces of Siegmund's sword, gathered up from the field after the ill-fated encounter. "He who one day shall swing this sword newly welded together, let him take his name from me: As Siegfried let him rejoice in victory!" From the soul of Sieglinde rises a soaring song of gratitude and praise, a song of purest, highest joy. Her last words to Brünnhilde, as clasping to her breast the broken sword she hastens away, are, interpreted: "My gratitude shall one day reward you, smiling at you in human form! . . . Farewell! Sieglinde in her woe calls down blessings upon you!"

THE VALKYRIE

The storm-cloud has reached the rock, Wotan's voice is heard: "Brünnhilde, stand!" At the sound of it, Brünnhilde's heart fails her; the hearts of the sisters, too, soften. Crowding together on the rocky peak, they let the culprit cower out of sight among them. But Wotan is not deceived; he addresses to the hidden daughter such sharp and searching reproaches that, her fear for herself losing all importance as these strike her heart, she steps forth from among the sister-Valkyries and meekly stands before her father, awaiting condemnation.

"Not I," he speaks, "punish you. Yourself you have framed your punishment!" And he exposes how by forgetting the whole duty of a Valkyrie—to deal victory or defeat according to Wotan's decree—she had made herself in effect no longer a Valkyrie. "No more shall I send you from Walhalla. . . . No longer shall you bring warriors to my hall. . . . From the tribe of the gods you are cut off, rejected from the eternal line. . . . Our tie is severed. . . . You are banished from my face!" The sisters break into lamentation. "Upon this mountain I banish you. In undefended sleep I shall seal you. Let the man then capture the maid who finds her upon his road and wakes her." The sisters endeavour to restrain him, pointing out that their own honour will suffer from such a scandal. He rejects this on the ground that they have nothing more whatever to do with the faithless sister. "A husband is to win her feminine favor; masterful man is henceforth to have her duty. By the fireside she shall sit and spin, an object of scorn to all beholders!" Brünnhilde drops at his feet, overwhelmed. Cries of horror and protest break from the others; he drives them from his presence with the threat of a similar fate to Brünnhilde's if they do not forthwith depart from her, and keep afar from the rock where she suffers her sentence. In a confusion of terror, which is not without the slightest point of

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

humour, the strong girls flee like leaves in the blast before Wotan's menace,—and Brünnhilde is left alone to plead her poor cause with the stern incensed father.

She conjures him first to silence his anger, and define to her the dark fault which has impelled him to reject the most loyal of his children. "I carried out your order," she protests. "Did I order you to fight for the Wälsung?" he inquires. "You did," she reminds him. "But I took back my instructions." "When Fricka had estranged you from your own mind. . . . Not wise am I, but this one thing I knew, that the Wälsung was dear to you. I was aware of the conflict which compelled you to turn from the remembrance of this. . . . I kept in sight for you that which, painfully divided in feeling, you must turn your back upon. Thus it was that I saw what you could not see. I saw Siegmund. I stood before him announcing death. I met his eye, I heard his voice, I apprehended the hero's ineffable distress. . . . I witnessed that which struck the heart in my bosom with awe and trembling. Timid and wondering I stood before him, in shame. I could think only how I might serve him. . . . And confidently counting upon an intimate understanding of him who had bred that love in my heart,—of that will which had attached me to the Wälsung,—I disobeyed your command!"

Wotan, in meeting this, shows how he is not merely a father dealing with a disobedient child, but a man in strife with himself, with his own will which has betrayed him into following affection, inclination, when duty called for an opposite course. "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee." Brünnhilde is to Wotan that offending flesh and blood, and the safety of the future depends, it seems, upon his breaking his own heart by cutting her off from himself. She has done what his heart would have had him do; but for interests whose claim

THE VALKYRIE

upon him is in his estimation greater than that of affection (*einer Welt zu Liebe* : for the sake of a world), he had elected not to follow his heart's impulse. And this delinquent, daughter at once and his own will, must not only be punished for the example of all the disobedient, but cut off from himself, to provide absolutely against any possible repetition of the so lovable and forgivable offence.

Brünnhilde, when she has heard him out, has no word further of argument or defence, but acquiesces with sad submissiveness. "Certainly the foolish maiden is no fit helpmate for you, who, confused by your amazing counsel, did not understand your mind, when her own mind prompted one thing only: to love that which you loved!" She accepts the punishment as just, only: "If you are to sever that which was bound together," she pleads, "to keep apart from yourself the very half of yourself, that I was once completely one with you, O god, forget it not! Your immortal part you cannot wish to dishonour. You cannot intend an ignominy which involves you. . . . Yourself you would be degraded, if you gave me over to insult!" "You followed, light of heart, the call of love," Wotan replies unconcedingly: "follow now him whom you must love!" "If I must depart from Walhalla, if I am to be your companion and servant no more," Brünnhilde pressingly continues, "if my obedience is to be given to masterful man, not of a coward and braggart let me be the prize! Let him not be worthless who shall win me!" "You cut yourself off from Walvater," he repulses her; "he cannot choose for you!" "A noble generation there is, having its origin in you—" Brünnhilde suggests, still unquelled, the point is so vital to her; "the most admirable of heroes, I know it, is to spring from the line of the Wälsungen. . . ." "Not a word of the Wälsungen!" Wotan fiercely interrupts. "When I severed from you, I severed from

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

them. Doomed to destruction is that line!" Sieglinde has been saved, Brünnhilde informs him, who shall give birth to the Walsung of whom she speaks. Wotan sternly silences her: let her not seek to shake his firmness. He cannot choose for her! He has loitered too long already. He cannot stop to consider what her wishes are, nothing further has he to do with her but to see his sentence executed.

What has he devised for her punishment, she asks.

He repeats his earlier sentence: "In deep sleep I shall seal you. He who awakes the defenceless sleeper, shall have her to wife." Brünnhilde falls on her knees to him. "If I am to be bound in fast sleep, an easy prey to the most ignoble of men, this one prayer you shall grant which a noble terror lifts to you: Let the sleeper be protected by a barrier of fright-inspiring things, that only a fearless and great-hearted hero may be able to reach me on my mountain-peak!" "Too much you demand! Too much of favour!" She clasps his knees, and with the wildest inspiration of terror: "This one prayer you must—must listen to! At your command let a great fire spring up. Let the summit be surrounded by fierce flames, whose tongues shall lick up and whose teeth shall devour any caitiff venturing near to the formidable place!" So is her whole soul heard to cry aloud in this prayer, as she pleads for so much more than her life, that all by which Wotan had fortified himself against her, and which had been subjected to an assault so prolonged, suddenly gives way, his weary heart is pierced. Overcome by emotion, he lifts her to her feet; he gazes long into her eyes, reading her soul there,—then amply, fully, with the whole of his overflowing heart, grants her prayer: "Farewell, O dauntless, glorious child! Holy pride of my heart, farewell! Farewell! Farewell! If I must shun you, if I am never more fondly to greet you, if you are no more to

THE VALKYRIE

ride at my side, or reach me the cup of mead; if I am to lose you whom I so have loved, O laughing joy of my eyes—a bridal bonfire shall blaze for you such as never yet blazed for a bride! A flaming barrier shall girdle the rock; with burning terror-signals it shall frighten away the coward. The faint-hearted shall keep afar from Brünnhilde's rock. That one alone shall win the bride, who is freer than I—the god!" In a speechless ecstasy of gratitude, Brünnhilde sinks on his breast, and he holds her long silently clasped, while there floats heavenward as if the very voice of their relieved, pacified, uplifted hearts. Supporting her in his arms, gazing tenderly in her upturned face, he takes his last leave of her. There is a passage in Wotan's farewell which seems to contain, compressed into it, all the yearning ache of all farewells, with all the sweetness of the love which makes parting bitter. "For the last time. . . . Farewell. . . . The last kiss. . . ." These words occur upon it. The motif it seems of the tragedy of last times; one wonders could custom ever so harden him to it that he should feel no clutch at the heart in hearing it. "For the last time I appease myself with the last kiss of farewell. . . . Upon a happier mortal the star of your eye shall beam. Upon the unhappy Immortal it must, in parting, close. For thus does the god turn away from you, thus does he kiss away your divinity!" He presses a long kiss upon each of her eyes, and the first languor of sleep falling at once upon her, she leans, without strength, against him. He supports her to a mossy knoll beneath a spreading pine-tree, and lays her gently upon it; after a long brooding look at her face, closes her helmet; after a long look at her sleeping form, covers it with the great Valkyrie shield; places her spear beside her, and with a last long sad look at the slumbering motionless figure, turns away,—having effectually desolated himself of the three dearest of his children.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Resolutely striding from the sleeper, he summons Loge, and commands him in his original form of elemental fire to surround the mountain-summit. At the shock of his spear against the rock, a flame flashes and rapidly spreads. With his spear Wotan traces the course the fire is to follow, girdling the peak. Nimble it leaps from point to point, till the whole background is fringed with flame. At Wotan's words, "Let no one who is afraid of my spear ever break through the fiery barrier!" there falls, prophetic, across the dream of Brünnhilde's charmed sleep, the great shadow of the Deliverer, so distant yet in time, Siegfried, who when the hour came of test was found to fear Wotan's spear as little as he feared anything else.

With that firm spell placed upon his magnificent and adequate fence, Wotan departs; and, guarded by the singing flames, which weave into the rhythm of their bright dance the tenderest of lullabies, Brünnhilde is left to her long rest.

SIEGFRIED

SIEGFRIED

I

Fafner, when he had become possessor of the Nibelungen treasure, conveyed it, as we have seen, to a cave in a lonesome forest, and there in the shape of a dragon mounted guard over it. Mime, the dwarf, in order to keep the same treasure under some sort of oversight, took up his abode in the forest, at a respectful distance from the flame-breathing monster. Alberich haunted the immediate neighbourhood of the cave.

Thus it happened that Sieglinde, directed by the Valkyries to that region, where she should be safest from Wotan's anger, was overheard by Mime, out in the lonesome wood, moaning in her trouble. He assisted her into his cave. There Siegfried was born, and there Sieglinde died. Mime reared the "Wälsungen-shoot" with solicitous care, in the ulterior view that this scion of a strong race when grown to man's size should kill Fafner for him and get him the Ring.

At the rise of the curtain we see Mime at his anvil, struggling with a heavy difficulty. He is fashioning a sword for Siegfried,—still another sword, after ever so many,—realising even as he works that no sword he can forge but will break in the lad's strong hands. "The best sword I ever forged, which in the hands of a giant would stand stiff, the insignificant strip-ling for whom it was shaped he whacks and snaps it in two, as if I had made him a child's plaything!" It is sober fact to Mime that he cannot use Siegfried for his purposes until he have

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

equipped him with a sword. "A sword there is," he continues his meditation, "which he could not break. The fragments of Nothung he never could shatter, could I weld the strong pieces together, which all my art cannot compass! Nothung alone could be of use, . . . and I cannot weld it, Nothung, the sword!"

Half-heartedly he has resumed his toil, when a joyous shout is heard from the forest, of which a sun-shot patch glimmers through the cave's mouth, and there storms in, driving before him a tethered bear, a magnificent youth, clad in skins, a silver horn at his side. The splendour of Siegfried's appearance is constantly referred to, the qualifications applied to him suggesting most frequently an effect he shed of light. This child of the unhappy Wälsungen seems to have been indelibly stamped with the joy of their one golden hour. Of Siegmund's tragic consciousness of frustration, of Sieglinde's sufferings, there is no trace in their vigorous offspring; but the super-abundant vitality of joy which lifted them to the lovers' seventh heaven for one triumphant hour is all in his young blood. He is big, strong, sane, comely, fearless, simple, ignorant of all mean passions and interests; pensive for moments, gay for hours—nearly boisterous; frank and outspoken to the point of brutality; unmannerly at times to the point of ruffianism; but the dice are loaded to secure our cherishing him right through his bright course, by that irresistible, ingrain joyousness of his, born of strength, balance, fearlessness.

Laughing immoderately, he urges the bear against Mime, who flees hither and thither to elude the fearful pair. "I am come in double force, the better to corner you. . . . Brownie, ask for the sword!" When assured by the trembling Mime that the sword is in readiness, he releases and sends home his shaggy ally. But when Mime hands him the newly finished

SIEGFRIED

sword, and he strikes it on the anvil, it flies to bits. The angry boy expresses his wish that he had smashed the sword on the disgraceful bungler's skull. "Shall such a braggart go on bragging? He prates me of giants and lusty fighting; of gallant deeds and solid armour; he will forge weapons for me, provide me with swords; he vaunts his art as if he could do something of account; but let me take hold of the thing he has hammered, with a single grip I crush flat the idle rubbish! If the creature were not so utterly mean, I would drop him into the forge-fire with all the stuff of his forging, the old imbecile hobgoblin! There might be an end then to vexation!" He casts himself fuming on a stone seat and turns his face toward the wall. The dwarf, who has kept his distance from the storming youth, tries to quiet him, reminds him of his benefits, of his teachings on the subject of gratitude. Ingratiatingly he brings him food. Siegfried without turning dashes spit and pipkin from his hands. The little man affects a deeply hurt sensibility. He rehearses at length all Siegfried has to thank him for, material necessities, education,—“With clever counsel I made you clever, with subtle wisdom I taught you wit. . . .” This tale of benefactions has been gone over so often that the dwarf has reached a fine glibness in it; the smooth air on which he enumerates the instances of his kindness has a peculiar cast of hypocrisy. He is so touched by the contemplation finally of his own goodness and Siegfried's hardness of heart that he falls to weeping. “And for all I have borne this is now the reward, that the hot-tempered boy torments and hates me!”

Siegfried has been calmly gazing into Mime's eyes; trying through these to get at the truth of him. Mime expresses surprise that after so many unquestionable services the boy should hate him; and the boy is not himself without a touch of wonder at the invincible antipathy with which this creature

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

inspires him, to whom yet he is actually indebted for many good offices. "Much you have taught me, Mime, and many a thing have I learned of you; but that which you have most cared to teach me, never have I succeeded in learning: how I could bear the sight of you! If you bring me food and drink, disgust takes the place of dinner; if you spread an easy couch for me, sleep on it becomes difficult; if you endeavour to teach me wise conversation, I prefer to be dumb and dull. Whenever I set eyes on you, I recognise as ill-done everything you do; whether I watch you stand, or waggle and walk, ducking, nidnodding, blinking with your eyes, my impulse is to catch the nidnodder by the scruff of the neck, to hurl out of the way for good and all the odious blinker! That is my manner, Mime, of being fond of you. Now, if you are wise, help me to know a thing which I have vainly reflected upon: I run into the woods to be rid of you; how does it happen that I come back? All animals are dearer to me than you, trees and birds, the fish in the stream, I am fonder of them all than I am of you; then how does it happen that I still come back? If you are wise, make clear to me this thing!" "My child," replies Mime, "you are informed by that circumstance how near I lie to your heart!" "I tell you I cannot bear you! Forget it not so soon!" Mime argues that such a thing is impossible, is out of nature; that what to the young bird is the old bird, which feeds it in the nest until it is fledged, that is to Siegfried, inevitably, Mime! This simile of Mime's suggests to Siegfried a further question. In asking it he has one of those brief accesses of pensiveness which endear him, disclosing the existence of a common human tenderness, after all, under that sturdy wrapping of joy befitting the child of demigods. "Now, since you are so wise, tell me still another thing: When the birds were singing so blithely in Spring, the one luring the other, you told me, as I wished to

SIEGFRIED

know, that they were male and female. They billed and cooed so engagingly, and would not leave each other; they built a nest and brooded in it; there was a fluttering presently of young wings, and the two cared for the young. I saw how, in the same way, the deer rested in the forest, in pairs; how even wild foxes and wolves did this. The male brought food to the lair, the female nursed the cubs. I learned from seeing this what love is—I never robbed the mother of her young. . . .” The music has been heaving and falling, as if with the warm palpitation of a vast breast, Nature’s own, blissful with love and happy creative force. “Now, where, Mime, is your loving mate, that I may call her mother?” Mime becomes cross: “What has come over you, mad boy? Now, what a numbskull it is! Are you a bird or a fox?” And at Siegfried’s next question he chafes: “You are to believe what I tell you: I am your father and mother at the same time!” But Siegfried vigorously objects: “There you lie, unspeakable gawk! How the young resemble their parents I have luckily observed for myself. More than once I have come to a clear stream: I have seen the trees and animals mirrored in it; the sun and clouds, exactly as they are, appear repeated on the shining surface. My own image, too, I have seen. Altogether different from you I seemed to myself: there is as much likeness between a toad and a gleaming fish, but never yet did a fish crawl out of a toad!” This latter bit in its short extent gives an amusing, characteristic illustration of Wagner’s method of painting with notes. With the first phrase, Siegfried’s impatient exclamation, comes the motif of Siegfried’s impetuosity; then, as he is describing it, a representation of the clear stream; upon this is sketched the image of Siegfried, in the notes of his proper motif, to which is added a bar of the heroism-of-the-Wälsungen motif, indicating his resemblance to the father be-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

fore him. At his mention of the toad, his metaphor for Mime, we hear the hammer of the Nibelung; and at his mention of the gleaming fish, the swimming phrase that accompanies the watery evolutions of the Rhine-maidens. The ingeniousness of all this would not perhaps of itself especially recommend the piece, were it not that the scheme is worked out to such beautiful purpose that the whole thing is lovely, and that, though one should know nothing whatever of the motifs, his ear must be charmed.

Satisfied by his own logic that Mime cannot be his progenitor, Siegfried now himself answers his earlier question: "When I run into the woods in the thought of forsaking you, how does it happen that I still return home? It is because from you I am to learn who are my father and mother!" Mime evades him: "What father! What mother! Idle question!" But Siegfried catches him by the throat, and the terrified dwarf communicates, grudgingly, a scant fact or two of his history. "Oh, ungrateful and wicked child! now hear for what it is you hate me. I am neither your father nor any kin of yours, and yet to me you owe your life. . . ." Making his own part in the story as meritorious as possible, he relates his taking into shelter the woman whom he had found moaning out in the wild woods. Siegfried, for once penetrated with sadness, wonder, and awe, breathes forth softly, when the sorrowful story is ended, "My mother—died then—of me?" He tries by questions to complete the dwarf's bare account: "Whence am I named Siegfried?" "Thus did your mother bid me call you." "What was my mother's name?" Mime feigns to have forgotten, but, roughly pressed, recalls it. "Then, I ask you, what was my father's name?" "Him I never saw!" "But my mother spoke the name?" "She only said that he had been slain." Siegfried is smitten with the suspicion that Mime

SIEGFRIED

may be lying to him, and demands some proof of all this which he has heard. Mime, after a moment's resistance, in terror of the boy's rising wrath, fetches from its hiding and shows him the pieces of a broken sword. "This was given me by your mother. For trouble, cost and care, she left it as paltry remuneration. Behold it! A broken sword! Your father, she said, carried it in the last battle, when he was slain." Siegfried's strong good spirits have already returned. "And these fragments," he cries, with enthusiasm, "you are to weld together for me. Then I shall swing my proper sword! Hurry, Mime! Quick to work! . . . Cheat me not with trumpery toys! In these fragments alone I place my faith. If I find you idle, if you join them imperfectly, if there are flaws in the hard steel, you shall learn burnishing from me! For this very day, I swear it, I mean to have the sword!" "What do you want this very day of the sword?" Mime inquires in alarm. Siegfried, his heart inexpressibly lightened by the positive knowledge that Mime is neither father nor any kin to him, bursts into merry singing: "To go away, out of the woods into the world. Never shall I come back! . . . As the fish gaily swims in the flood, as the finch freely flies afar, so shall I fly, so shall I dart . . . that I may never, Mime, see you more!" Off he storms into the forest, leaving Mime shouting after him, a prey to the utmost anxiety. The dwarf's difficulty is now twofold: "To the old care I have a new one added!" How to retain the wild fellow and guide him to Fafner's nest, and how to mend those pieces of stubborn steel. "No forge is there whose glow can soften the thorough-bred fragments. No dwarf's hammer can compel the hard pieces. . . ." In unmitigated despair, void of counsel, he drops on his seat behind the anvil and weeps.

Ushered by great calm chords, measured and dignified as the gait of a god on his travels, a wayfarer appears at the en-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

trance of the cave. He wears an ample deep-blue mantle, and for staff carries a spear. On his head is a broad hat, the brim of which dips so as to conceal one of his eyes. It is Wotan. Since parting from Brünnhilde he has had no heart for warfare, no heart to ride to battle without the "laughing joy of his eyes." Alone, unresting, he has wandered all over the wide earth in search of counsel and, very likely, distraction. A spectator he is in these days and not an actor. His spirit has reached a state of philosophic calm. He has learned better certainly than to meddle any more with anything that concerns the accursed Ring. He is brought into the neighbourhood of the still interested actors in that old drama in part by curiosity; in part, no doubt, by the wish to watch the actions of Siegfried, his beloved children's child. But in some faintest degree, at least, it would seem, he is brought here by the invincible need to influence these fortunes just a little, though it be firmly fixed that he is not to try directly or indirectly to divert the Ring into any channel which shall bring it eventually to himself. All else being equal, he had a little rather strengthen Mime's chances of getting the Ring, through Siegfried, than inactively see it fall to the inveterate enemy, Alberich.

At the greeting he speaks from the threshold to the "wise smith," Mime starts up in affright: "Who is it, pursuing me into the forest wilderness?" "Wanderer is the world's name for me. Far have I wandered, much have I bestirred myself on the back of the earth." "Then bestir yourself now, and do not loiter here, if Wanderer is the world's name for you!" Mime, with his head full of his dark little projects, has a deep dread of spics and interference. At every step the Wanderer takes further into his dwelling, he utters a sharper protest; and at every protest the Wanderer calmly advances a step further. "Through much research, much have I learned," speaks

SIEGFRIED

Wanderer, "I could impart to many a one things of importance to him; I could deliver many a one from that which troubles him—from the gnawing care of the heart." And after still another irritated dismissal from Mime: "Many a one has imagined himself to be wise, but the thing which he most needed to know, he knew not. I gave him leave to ask me what should help him, and enlightened him by my word." And after again being nervously shown the door: "Here I sit by the fireside," speaks blandly Wanderer, suiting the action to the word, "and I set my head as stake in a match of wits. My head is yours, you have won it, if you do not, by questioning me, succeed in learning what shall profit you; if I do not, by my instructions, redeem the pledge."

It is plain enough that if Mime would now expose to the Wanderer the source of the gnawing care at his heart, and ask him how Nothung might be welded, he would receive the information. Wotan is clearly eager to give it, yet cannot do so directly, or he would be too crudely meddling again in the Ring affair: he cannot press on him his counsel, but, at his old trick of ingenuous double-dealing, might by means of this guessing-game make shift to convey it to him.

Mime, old and wise as he is, has yet in certain directions a dwarfed understanding; certainly not enough generosity to trust anybody, or conceive of a disinterested desire to do him a good turn. His whole concern now is how to be rid of this large tactless personage. "I must question him in such a manner as to trap him," he says to himself. It is agreed that he shall have three questions. He sits brooding a moment, trying to find something very difficult indeed. The motif of Mime's cogitations, which has already been frequently heard in this act, gives amusingly the unheroic colour of the sordid little mind's workings. He fixes upon questions concerning things which

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

might be supposed little known to a wanderer of human descent, even such a much-travelled and conceited one. First: What race reigns in the depths of the earth? Second: What race rests upon the back of the earth? Third: What race dwells on the cloudy heights? Wotan readily answers all these, giving bits of the histories of the races in question, the Nibelungen, the Giants, and the Gods. As he describes the spear of Wotan, whose lord all must eternally obey, he with an involuntary gesture of command brings his spear hard down on the stone floor. Faint thunder results. Terror falls upon Mime, who by the light shining for a moment from his countenance, has recognised the god. "You have solved the questions and saved your head," he says hurriedly, without looking Wotan in the face. "Now, Wanderer, go your way!" But the Wanderer declares that according to custom in such contests, it is the dwarf's turn now to answer three questions or lose his head. "It is a long time," Mime ventures timidly, "since I left my native place; a long time since I departed from the bosom of earth, my mother; I once saw the gleam of Wotan's eye as he looked into the cave; my mother-wit dwindles before him. . . ." But the wee fellow has no mean conceit of his wisdom, and is really not as uneasy as might be expected of one in his position. "Perhaps I shall be so lucky," he suggests, not without complacency, "as, under this compulsion, to deliver the dwarf's head!" Wotan asks him, for the first question,—and the pain of the memories oppressing him is translated to us by the motif of parting, the motif of "last times," while the god's tones are infinitely tender—"What race is it to which Wotan shows himself stern, and which yet he loves the best of all living?" Glibly Mime answers, showing a full acquaintance with the circumstances, "The Wälsungen." Wotan passes on to the second question: "A wise Nibelung keeps watch over Sieg-

SIEGFRIED

fried. He is to kill Fafner for him, that he may get the Ring and become lord of the Hort. What sword now must Siegfried wield, if he is to deal death to Fafner?" Mime, delighted with himself, readily replies: "Nothung is the name of a notable sword. . . . The fragments of it are preserved by a wise smith, for he knows that with the Wotan-sword alone an intrepid stupid boy, Siegfried, shall destroy the dragon." He rubs his hands in goblin glee. "Am I, dwarf, in the second instance still to retain my head?" Wanderer, with a laugh for his antics, felicitates him: "The most keen-witted are you among the wise; who can equal you in acuteness? But seeing you are so cunning as to use the boyish hero for your dwarf-purposes, with the third question I now make bold: Tell me, wise armourer, who, out of the strong fragments, shall forge Nothung anew?" Consternation falls upon the dwarf. Who, indeed? Was not that question the very hub around which turned all his troubled reflections? Had it not been that which was forcing tears from him at the moment of the Wanderer's arrival? He runs hither and thither distracted, in broken exclamations admitting that he himself cannot forge the sword, and how should he know who can perform the miracle? The Wanderer rises from his seat beside the hearth. "Three questions you were free to ask. Three times I was open to consultation. You inquired of things idle and remote, but that which was closest to you, that which might profit you, did not enter your mind. Now that I have guessed it, you lose your senses with fright. I have won the witty head. Now, brave conqueror of Fafner, hear, doomed dwarf: Only one who has never known fear can forge Nothung anew." On his way to the mouth of the cave, he turns for another word to the chap-fallen Mime: "Look out for your wise head from this day forth: I leave it in forfeit to him who has never learned fear!" With a laugh for the double-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

horned dilemma in which he leaves the "honest dwarf," he passes forth into the woods.

As Mime gazes after him, violent trembling seizes the poor little smith. The flashing among the leaves of Wotan's winged horse his terror mistakes for the flaming of Fafner's gaping jaws; and the sound of a rushing approach for the monster crashing toward him through the underbrush. With the cry: "The dragon is upon me! Fafner! Fafner!" he cowers behind the anvil.

The alarming noise proves to have been only Siegfried coming with characteristic impetuosity to ask for his sword. "Hey, there! Lazy-bones! Have you finished? Quick! What success with the sword?" Mime is not in sight. His voice is heard, faint, from his hiding-place: "Is it you, child? Are you alone?" Siegfried for some time can draw no satisfactory answer from him, no matter how roughly pressed. The dwarf is caught between two difficulties, and must first of all things try to think out for himself the safest course of action. Only by one who has never known fear can Nothung, the indispensable, be forged. "Too wise am I for such work!" he soliloquizes. On the other hand, his wise head is forfeit to one who has never learned fear. Of the two difficulties, the latter is obviously the one to be first attended to. Siegfried fills the description dangerously well of the foretold fatal enemy. "How shall I contrive to teach him fear?" is Mime's nearest interest. Siegfried, irritated by his continued hesitation, finally catches hold of him. "Ha? Must I lend a hand? What have you forged and furbished to-day?" "With no care but for your welfare," answers Mime, "I was sunk in thought as to how I should instruct you in a thing of great importance." "You were sunk quite under the seat," laughs Siegfried; "what of great importance did you discover there?" "I there learned fear for your sake, that I might teach it to you,

SIEGFRIED

dunce." "What about fear?" Siegfried asks. "You know nothing about it, and you are thinking of going from the woods out into the world? Of what use to you would be the strongest sword, if you had no knowledge of fear? . . . Into the crafty world I shall not let you fare before you have learned fear." "If it is an art, why am I unacquainted with it? Out with it! What about fear?" "Have you never felt,"—asks Mime, in a voice which at the suggestion of his own words falls to quaking, "have you never felt, in the dark woods, at twilight, . . . when there are sounds in the distance of rustling, humming and sighing, when wild muttering gusts sweep past, disorderly fire-wisps flicker around you, a swelling confused sound surges toward you,—have you not felt a shuddering horror seize upon your limbs? A burning chill shakes your frame, your senses swim and fail; the alarmed heart trembling in your breast hammers to the point of bursting? If you have never felt these things, fear is unknown to you!" The music of fear is a darkened and discoloured fire-music through which we recognise, as if under a disguise veiling something of its beauty, the motif of Brünnhilde's sleep. If one looks for reasons, one can suppose the reference to be, as to a type of fearful things, to the terror-inspiring barrier surrounding Brünnhilde; and imagine a jesting intimation that fear, as Siegfried should eventually learn it, is the sensation suspending the heart-beats at sight of a beautiful woman in her sleep.

Siegfried has listened to Mime in amused wonder: "Strange exceedingly must that be! My heart, I feel, stands firm and hard in its place. That creeping and shuddering, glowing and shivering, turning hot and turning dizzy, hammering and trembling, I wish to feel the terror of it, I long for that delight! But how can you, Mime, bring it about?" "Just follow me. I will guide you to some purpose. I have thought it all out.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

I know a dreadful dragon; he has slain already and swallowed many; Fafner will teach you fear, if you follow me to his lair." "Where is his lair?" "Neidhöhle it is called. (*Neid*: envy; *Höhle*: cavern.) Eastward it lies at the end of the wood." "Then it is not far from the world?" "The world is close by." "You are to take me there, and when I have learned fear, away, into the world! So quick! Give me my sword! I will swing it out in the world!" Mime confesses that he neither has mended, nor ever can mend, the sword in question. "No dwarf's strength is equal to it. More likely," he suggests, "one who knows no fear may discover the art!" Siegfried, heartily weary of Mime's paltering, snatches up the fragments of Nothung: "Here, the pieces! Away with the bungler! My father's steel doubtless will let itself be welded by me. Myself I will forge the sword!" And he falls to work. "If you had taken diligent pains to learn the art, it would now, of a truth, profit you," remarks Mime; "but you were always lazy at the lesson. What proper work can you do now?" "What the master cannot do," Siegfried aptly retorts, "the apprentice might, if he had always minded him? Take yourself off! Meddle not with this, or you may tumble with it into the fire!" He heaps fuel on the hearth, fastens the sword in a vice and starts filing it. Mime watches him, and at this which looks like folly, cannot restrain the exclamation: "What are you doing? Take the solder! You are filing away the file!" But the disposition of the young fellow without fear shows in his method with the sword. With a brave thoroughness he reduces the whole blade to steel filings. Mime follows all his movements. "Now I am as old as this cavern and these woods, but such a thing have I never seen! He will succeed with the sword, that I plainly apprehend. In his fearlessness he will make it whole. The Wanderer knew it well! How, now, shall

SIEGFRIED

I hide my endangered head? It is forfeit to the intrepid boy unless Fafner shall teach him fear—But, woe's me, poor wretch, how will he slay the dragon, if he learns fear from him? How will he obtain the Ring for me? Accursed dilemma! Here am I fast caught, unless I find me wise counsel how to bring under compulsion the fearless one himself. . . .” “Quick, Mime!” Siegfried interrupts Mime's meditations; “what is the name of the sword which I have ground into filings?” “Nothung is the name of the notable sword; your mother gave me the information.” Siegfried at work falls to lusty singing, a song of primitive character, of a kind with what one can suppose Tubal-cain singing at his ancient anvil. We see him pumping the forge-bellows while the steel melts, pouring the metal into a mould, cooling the mould in a water-trough, breaking the plaster, heating the sword, hammering the red blade, cooling it again, riveting the handle, polishing the whole, —all of which actions his song celebrates: “Nothung! Nothung! Notable sword! (*Neidliches Schwert* is literally “covetable sword”); Why must you of old be shattered? To powder I have ground your sharp magnificence. I now melt the filings in the crucible. Hoho! Hoho! Hahei! Hahei! Blow, bellows, brighten the glow! Wild in the forest grew a tree. I hewed it down, I burned the brown ash to charcoal. It lies heaped now on the hearth. The coals of the tree, how bravely they burn, how bright and clear they glow! Upward they fly in a spray of sparks and melt the steel-dust. Nothung! Nothung! Notable sword! Your powdered steel is melting, in your own sweat you are swimming, soon I shall swing you as my sword!”

Mime during this has been revolving his own problem, and has hit upon a plan which seems to him to meet all the difficulties of his case: Siegfried, beyond a doubt, will forge the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

sword and kill Fafner. While he is tired and heated from the encounter, Mime will offer him a drink brewed from simples of his culling, a few drops of which will plunge the boy into deep sleep, when, with the weapon he is at this moment forging, Mime will clear him out of the way and take possession of Ring and treasure. Enchanted with his inspiration, he sets to work at once preparing the somniferous drink.

Siegfried is singing at the top of his lungs: "In the water flowed the stream of fire, it hissed aloud in anger, but the cold tamed and chilled it; in the water it flows no more, stiff and hard it is become, the lordly steel—but hot blood will bathe it soon. Now sweat again that I may forge you, Nothung, notable sword!" He catches sight of Mime pottering with the cooking utensils. "There is a wise smith come to shame," the old man answers the youth's mocking inquiry; "the teacher receives lessons from his pupil; all is up with art for the old one, he will serve the young one as cook! While the young one makes iron into broth, the old one will prepare a dish of eggs!" With impish relish of the inwardness of the situation, he stirs the mixture in the pot.

"Hoho! Hahei! Hoho!" Siegfried proceeds with his work and his singing; "shape, my hammer, a hard sword! Blood once dyed your pallid blue, its trickling red brightened you, you laughed coldly, you cooled off the hot liquid. Now the fire has made you glow red, your soft hardness yields to the hammer; you dart angry sparks at me, because I have tamed you, stubborn! The merry sparks, how they delight me! Anger adorns the brave. You are gaily laughing at me, though you feign to be angry and sullen. Hoho! Hahei! By means of heat and hammer I have achieved it, with stalwart blows I have shaped you; now let the red shame vanish, become as hard and cold as you can. . . ."

SIEGFRIED

Mime is meanwhile revelling in dreams of the greatness which is to follow upon his acquisition of the Ring. He fairly skips up and down as he thinks of it all: Brother Alberich himself reduced to subjection, the whole world bowing at the nod of his, Mime's, head. No more toil, others to toil for him. . . . "Mime is king, Prince of the Nibelungen, lord over all! Hei, Mime! who would have thought it of you?"

"Nothung! Nothung! Notable sword!" harmoniously bel-lows Siegfried; "now you are fast in your hilt. You were in two, I have forced you into one. No blow after this shall break you. In the dead father's hand the steel snapped, the living son forged it anew; now its bright gleam flashes like laughter, its sharp edge cuts clean. Nothung! Nothung! Young and renewed! I have brought you back to life. You lay dead there, in fragments; now you flash lightning, defiant and brave! Show caitiffs your gleam! Strike the traitor! Fell the villain!" He waves over his head the finished sword: "Look, Mime, you smith—thus cuts Siegfried's sword!" He brings it down upon the anvil, which falls apart, cleft from top to bottom. Mime tumbles over with amazement.

II

The next scene shows the woods before Fafner's cave. It is night. Alberich is dimly distinguishable, lurking among the rocks, brooding his dark thoughts, as he keeps covert watch over the treasure. He is startled by what seems an untimely break of day, accompanied by a great gust of wind. This defines itself as a galloping gleam—a shining horse rushing through the forest. "Is it already the slayer of the dragon?" he wonders; "is it he, already, who shall kill Fafner?" A moon-beam breaking through the clouds reveals the form of the Wan-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

derer advancing toward Neidhöhle. The enemies see and recognise each other. Alberich, though greatly alarmed at this inopportune presence, breaks into angry vituperation: "Out of the way, shameless robber. . . . Your intrigues have done harm enough!" "I am come to look on, not to act," Wotan replies, grandly mild and unruffled; "who shall deny me a wanderer's right of way?" Alberich, as if words of offence were actually missiles, showers them thick upon the unmoved god. He points out, virulently, the strength of his own position compared with Wotan's, in whose hand that spear of his must fly to pieces should he break a covenant established as sacred by the runes carved on its shaft. Wanderer, a shade weary of such a berating, yet losing little of his placidity, retorts: "Not through any runes of truth to covenants did my spear bind you, malignant, to me; you my spear forces to bow before me by its strength; I carefully keep it therefore for purposes of war." "How haughtily do you threaten in your defiant strength," the rabid Alberich continues, "yet how uneasy is all within your breast. . . . Doomed to death through my curse is Fafner, guardian of the treasure. Who will inherit from him? Will the illustrious Hort come once more into the possession of the Nibelung? The thought gnaws you with unsleeping care. For, let me hold it again in this fist, far otherwise than thick-witted giants shall I employ the power of the Ring; then let the holy keeper of the heroes tremble; the heights of Walhalla I shall storm with the hosts of Hella, the world then will be mine to govern!" Tranquilly Wotan receives this: "I know your meaning, but it creates in me no uneasiness. He shall rule through the Ring who obtains it." This calm of Wotan's gives Alberich the idea that the god must, so to speak, have cards up his sleeve. "On the sons of heroes," he suggests ironically, "you place your insolent reliance, fond

SIEGFRIED

blossoms of your own blood. Good care have you taken of a young fellow—not so?—who cunningly shall pluck the fruit which you dare not yourself break off?” “Not with me”—Wotan cuts short the discussion, “wrangle with Mime. Danger threatens you through your brother. He is bringing to this spot a youth who is to slay Fafner for him. The boy knows nothing of me. The Nibelung uses him for his own purposes. Wherefore, I tell you, comrade, do freely as you choose!” Alberich can scarcely believe that he has heard aright. “You will keep your hand from the treasure?” Serenely and broadly, Wotan declares—a touch of that tenderness in his tone which the thought of the Wälsungen always has power to arouse—“Whom I love I leave to act for himself: let him stand or fall, his own lord is he. I have no use save for heroes!” This sounds very fair; to Alberich almost too fair. He presses Wotan with further questions. The answers are elusive as oracles, but satisfy Alberich of thus much: that Wotan is himself out of the struggle for the Ring. To point his personal disinterestedness, the god even offers to wake the dragon, that Alberich may warn him of the approaching danger and peradventure receive in token of gratitude—the Ring! We suspect in this Wotan’s taste for a joke, unless it be an exhibition of that other trait of the god’s, the need to gratify his conscience with a comedy of fairness. At this moment he is not, it is true, interfering; but he is confidently watching the play of forces set working by him long ago. The strong Siegfried armed with the rejuvenated Sieges-schwert is a force having its impulse originally from him. At this moment, perhaps because the events immediately impending have cast their shadows across the sensitive consciousness of an at times prophet, he is in no uneasiness whatever with regard to the fate of the Ring. To Alberich’s mystification, he actually

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

rouses Fafner. "Who disturbs my sleep?" comes a hollow roar from the cave. The Fafner-motif is the old motif of the giants, slightly altered so that instead of the ponderous tread of the brothers it suggests the muffled ponderous beat of a gigantic sinister heart. Wotan and Alberich explain to the dragon his danger and indicate what may buy him safety. Having heard them out, Fafner, unseen in the cave, gives a long lazy comfortable yawn. "I lie and possess! Let me sleep!" Wotan laughs. "Well, Alberich, the plan failed. But abuse me no more, you rogue! One thing, I further enjoin you, keep well in mind: Everything is after its kind, and this kind you cannot alter!" The broad Erda-motif accompanies this maxim. "Take a firm stand! Put your skill to use with Mime, your brother. He is of the kind you understand better. What is of a different kind, learn now to know, too. . . ." When Wotan disappears, the galloping is heard, through the storm-wind that for a moment agitates the leaves of the forest, of his rising Luft-ross. His obscure last words have left Alberich puzzled, sorer and angrier than ever. The air is full of curse-motif. "Laugh on, you light-minded luxurious tribe of the gods! I shall still see you all gone to destruction. While the gold shines in the light there is a wise one keeping watch—His spite will circumvent you all!" He hides himself among the tumbled rocks near the cave-mouth from the brightening light of dawn.

Mime enters guiding Siegfried. "This is the spot, go no further!" Siegfried seats himself under a great tree; they have been travelling through the woods all night. "This is the place where I am to learn fear?" he inquires light-heartedly. The excursion, as far as he knows, has for its single object to teach him that art. He is not of a suspicious turn and does not ask what interest in his education has Mime, in whose

SIEGFRIED

affection he instinctively does not believe. "Now, Mime," he instructs the dwarf, "you are after this to avoid me. If I do not learn here what I should learn, I shall fare further alone, I shall finally be rid of you!" "Believe me, dear boy," says the dwarf, "if you do not learn fear to-day and here, with difficulty shall you learn it elsewhere and at another time!" He directs the youth's eye to the black mouth of the dragon-hole and describes with griesly detail the monster inhabiting it. Siegfried listens unimpressed. Hearing, in answer to his inquiry, that the monster has a heart and that it is in the usual place: "I will drive Nothing into the overweening brute's heart!" he determines lightly. He is sceptical with regard to the lesson in fear which he has been promised. "Just wait!" Mime warns him. "What I said was empty sound in your ears. You must hear and see the creature himself. . . . Remain where you are. When the sun climbs high, watch for the dragon. He will come out of his cave and pass along this way to go and drink at the spring." "Mime," says Siegfried, with a laugh for his foolish big-boy joke, "if you are to be at the spring I will not hinder the dragon from going there. I will not drive Nothing into his spleen until he has drunk you up. Wherefore, take my advice: do not lie down to rest at the water's edge, but take yourself off as far as ever you can, and never come back!" Mime is too near, as he thinks, the hour of triumph, to take offence. May he not be permitted, after the fight, to refresh the victor with a drink? He will be near. Let Siegfried call him if he needs advice, . . . or if he finds the sensation of fear delectable!

When Siegfried has freed himself of Mime, whose company seems to become more and more unendurable as he is nearer parting from him for ever, he stretches out again under the great tree, folding his arms beneath his head. "That that

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

fellow is not my father," he muses, "how glad am I of that! The fresh woodland only begins to please me, the glad daylight to smile to me, now that the offensive wretch is out of my sight!" He drives away the thought of him and lets sweeter reflections gradually absorb him. The leaves rustle and waiver; delicate shafts of sunshine drop through them and play over the forest floor. The exquisiteness of the hour, by its natural power over the mood, turns the lonely boy's thoughts toward the only human beings life has so far given him to love,—and in images so vague and distant! "How did my father look?" he wonders dreamily, and answers himself: "Like me, of course!" After a longer spell of gazing up among the trees, while the soft influences of the fragrant woodland world and lovely summer day still further overmaster him: "But—how did my mother look? . . . That I cannot in the least picture! Like the doe's, I am sure, shone her limpid lustrous eyes—only, more beautiful by far!" The thought of her death fills him with boundless sadness, but not sharp or bitter,—dreamy and sweet from its tenderness. "When she had born me, wherefore did she die? Do human mothers always die of their sons? How sad were that! Oh, might I, son, behold my mother! . . . My mother—a woman of humankind!" The motif of mother-love is but a slight, beautiful variation from the motif of love in nature accompanying Siegfried's reference to the deer paired in the woods, that strain like the heaving of a great heart oppressed by its burden of love. The thought of his never-known mother draws forth sighs from Siegfried's lips. A long time he lies silent. The Freia-motif, the motif of beauty, clambers upward like a dewy branch of wild clematis. All is still around, but the little wind-stirred leaves, which weave and weave as if a delicate green gold-shot fabric of sound. Against this airy tapestry suddenly stands forth like a vivid pattern the

SIEGFRIED

warbling of a bird. Over and over, with pretty variations, the bird gives its note. It catches Siegfried's attention; he listens. "You sweet little bird," he at last addresses the singer up among the branches, "I never heard you before. Is your home here in the forest? . . ." The thought occurs to him, so natural to the simple: "Could I but understand the sweet babbling, certainly it would tell me something—perhaps about the dear mother!" He remembers hearing from Mime that one might come to understand the language of the birds. Attractive possibility! Pricked by his desire at once to bring it about, he springs up, cuts one of the reeds growing around the pool where Fafner goes to drink, and fashions it into a pipe. He tries upon it to imitate the bird-note. "If I can sing his language," is his reasoning, "I shall understand, no doubt, what he sings!" After repeated attempts, charmingly comical, and much vain mending of the reed with the edge of Nothung, he grows impatient, is ashamed of his unsucccess before the "roguish listener." He tosses away the silly reed and takes his silver horn. "A merry wild-wood note, such as I can play, you shall hear! I have sounded it as a call to draw to me some dear companion. So far, nothing better has come than a wolf or a bear. Let us see, now, what it attracts this time, whether a dear comrade will come to the call?" He places the horn to his lips and sounds the cheery *Lock-weise* (lure-call) over and over, with long sustained notes between the calls, during which he looks up at the bird, to see how he likes it. As a variation he plays the motifs which describe himself, the large heroic Siegfried-motif, and then the gay, rash, lesser Nothung-Siegfried motif. He has returned to the *Lock-weise*, and is repeating it with obstinate persistence, a-mind not to stop until the companion his lonesomeness yearns for shall have answered him when a bellowing sound behind him makes him face

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

about. We had been warned already by the *Wurm*-motif, heard before in Nibelheim, when Alberich by the power of the Tarnhelm turned himself into a dragon. Siegfried at sight of Fafner, whom the loud Lock-weise has drawn from his slumbers and his cave, laughs aloud: "My tune has charmed forth something truly lovely! A tidy comrade you would make for me!" "What is that?" roars Fafner, fixing the glare of his eyes upon the shapely form of Siegfried, insignificant in size, as he counts it. "Haha!" cries Siegfried, enchanted to hear from an animal talk which he can understand. "If you are an animal that can speak, you very likely can teach me something. Here is one who does not know fear; can he learn it from you?" "Is this insolence?" asks the amazed brute. "Call it insolence or what you please, but I shall fall upon you bodily, unless you teach me fear." Fafner laughs grimly, as if he licked his chops: "I wanted drink, I now find meat as well!" He shows the red interior of his vast jaws fringed with teeth. There is a brief further exchange of threats and jeers, then Fafner bellows: "Pruh! Come on, swaggering child!" Siegfried shouts: "Look out, bellower, the swaggerer comes!" and, Nothung in hand, leaps to the assault. Vainly Fafner spouts flame to blind and terrify him. The fight ends as it must. The dragon falls beneath the Wotan-sword, wielded by the hero without fear.

With his failing breath, in a tone strangely void of resentment, the dragon questions his slip of an adversary, so unexpectedly victorious: "Who are you, intrepid boy, that have pierced my heart? Who incited the child to the murderous deed? Your brain never conceived that which you have done. . . ." A motif we have come to know well punctuates the dying speech of this still another victim of the curse on the Ring. "I do not know much, as yet," Siegfried replies; "I do not know even

SIEGFRIED

who I am. But it was yourself roused my temper to fight with you." The last of the giants, his hollow voice growing fainter, tells the "clear-eyed boy," the "rosy hero," who it is he has slain, and warns him of the treachery surrounding the owner of the Hort. "Tell me further from whom I am descended," speaks Siegfried; "wise, of a truth, do you appear, wild one, in dying. Guess it from my name. Siegfried I am called!" But the Worm sighing, "Siegfried! . . ." gives up the breath.

After a moment's contemplation of the mountainous dead, Siegfried resolutely drags from his breast the sword which he had driven in up to the hilt. A drop of the dragon's blood spurts against his hand. With the exclamation: "The blood burns like fire!" he lifts his finger to his mouth. At once his attention is arrested by the voices of the birds. With increasing interest he harkens: It seems to him almost as if the birds were speaking to him; a distinct impression he receives of words. "Is it the effect of tasting the blood?" he wonders. "That curious little bird there, hark, what is he saying to me?" From the tree-top come clear words on a bird's warble: "Hei, to Siegfried belongs now the Nibelung's treasure! Oh, might he find the Hort in the cave! If he should win the Tarnhelm it would serve him for delightful adventures; but if he should find the Ring it would make him sovereign of the world!" Siegfried has listened with bated breath. "Thanks, dear little bird, for your advice. Gladly will I do as you bid!" He enters the cave. As he disappears, Mime crawls near to convince himself ocularly of Fafner's death. At the same moment, Alberich slips from his hiding-place and throws himself across Mime's path, to bar his way to the treasure. A bitter quarrel at once springs up between the brothers; Alberich claims the treasure because it is rightly his, Mime because he reared the youth who has recovered it from the dragon. Mime, whom

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Alberich's violence cowed still as in the old days, offers to share, if he may have the Tarnhelm—a sly proposition,—he will renounce the Ring; but this Alberich hears with furious scorn, and the wrangle is at its height when Siegfried reappears at the cave's mouth. In his hands are Tarnhelm and Ring. Returning into sight after the angry cat-fight between the ill-conditioned pair, he appears more than ever large, serene, fair, noble. Mime and Alberich betake themselves quickly back to their lurking-places. Siegfried stands considering his odd-looking acquisitions: "Of what use you may be to me I know not; but I took you from the heaped gold of the treasure because a good adviser bade me. As ornaments you shall serve, bearing witness to this day; these baubles shall remind me that in combat I slew Fafner, but failed still to learn fear!" He places the ring on his finger and the Tarnhelm at his belt. In the silence that falls, he listens again for the voice of the bird. It suddenly drops from the tree-top: "Hei! Siegfried possesses the Tarnhelm and Ring! Oh, let him not trust Mime the false! If Siegfried should listen closely to the wretch's hypocritical words, he would penetrate the true meaning of Mime's heart; such is the virtue of the taste of dragon's blood!" No sooner has Siegfried heard, than he sees Mime approaching. He waits for him, leaning on his sword, quietly watchful. The little man contorts body and face into postures and expressions as humbly flattering and cajoling as he can; at every few steps he scrapes and curtsseys. "Welcome, Siegfried! Tell me, you soul of courage, have you learned fear?" "Not yet have I found the teacher!" "But the Serpent-Worm which you slew, a fearsome fellow, was he not?" "Grim and malignant though he were, his death verily grieves me, since miscreants of deeper dye still live at large. The one who bade me murder him, I hate more than the dragon!"

SIEGFRIED

Mime to all appearance takes these words as if they carried no offence. What he thinks he is saying in reply we know not; but this is what, spoken in a voice of tenderest affection, Siegfried hears: "Gently now! Not much longer shall you see me. I shall soon close your eyes for their eternal sleep. That which I needed you for you have accomplished; all I wish, now, is to wrest from you the treasure. I believe I shall effect this with small trouble. You know you are not difficult to befool!" "So you are meditating harm to me?" Siegfried asks quietly. Mime starts in amazement. "Did I say anything of the sort?"

Then again, in accents sickly-sweet, with the writhings and grimaces of an excessive affection: "Siegfried, listen, my son! You and the like of you I have always hated from my very heart. Out of love I did not rear you, burdensome nuisance. The trouble I took was for the sake of the treasure in Fafner's keeping. If you do not give it to me willingly, Siegfried, my son, it must be plain even to yourself, you will have to leave me your life!" This formal and direct declaration of hate, proving the justice of his instinctive dislike all along of Mime, calls forth from Siegfried's relief even in this moment the exclamation: "That you hate me, I gladly hear!" Mime, while giving himself visibly all the pains in the world to disguise from Siegfried his intentions, to each of the youth's questions answers, in the supposition that he is telling his lies, the exact truth. Thus Siegfried learns that the drink Mime has prepared for his refreshment will plunge him into deep sleep, upon which, for greater security in his enjoyment of the treasure, Mime will with Nothung cut off his head. The little monster chuckles genially while making these revelations. As Mime reaches him the treacherous drink, Siegfried, moved by an impulse of overpowering disgust, with a sudden swift blow of No-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

thung strikes him down. Alberich's laugh of glee and derision rings out from his hiding-place.

After gazing for a moment at the body of the repulsive little traitor,—with the after-thought, it is possible, that the flat of Nothung would have been sufficient for anything so small, though so venomous,—he gives it the obsequies which seem to him the most fitting. He throws him in the cave, that he may lie on the heaped gold and have the coveted treasure at last for his own. He drags Fafner to the cave's mouth, that his bulk may block it. "Lie there, you too, dark dragon! Guard at once the shining treasure and the treasure-loving enemy; thus have you both found rest!"

The sun is high; heated with his exertions, Siegfried returns to his mossy couch under the trees, and is presently again looking overhead for the friendly bird. "Once more, dear little bird, after such a troublesome interruption, I should be glad to listen to your singing. I can see you swinging happily on the bough; brothers and sisters flutter around you, blithe and sweet, twittering the while. . . ." A vague sadness touches his mood, and this pensive moment goes far toward gaining back to him the sympathy which his overgreat sturdiness in dealing death had perhaps forfeited. He is now a poor lonesome beautiful boy, completely sweet-blooded and brave—the hunter that has never robbed the mother of her young—whose heart full of instinctive affection has never had an object on which it could spend itself. "But I," he says enviously to the bird, "I am so alone! I have neither brother nor sister! My mother vanished,—my father fell,—their son never saw them. . . . In this humour he lets a shade of regret transpire for the necessity to kill Mime. "My only companion was a loathly dwarf; goodness never knit the bond of affection between us; artful toils the cunning foe spread for me. I was at last even forced

SIEGFRIED

to slay him!" He stares sorrowfully at the sky through the trees. "Friendly bird, I ask you now: will you assist my quest for a good comrade? Will you guide me to the right one? I have called so often and never found one; you, my trusty one, will surely hit it better! So apt has been the counsel given by you already! Now sing! I am listening for your song!" Readily the bright voice from above answers in a joyous warble: "Hei! Siegfried has slain the wicked dwarf! I have in mind for him now the most glorious mate! On a high rock she sleeps, a wall of flame surrounds her abode. If he should push through the fire, if he should waken the bride, then were Brünnhilde his own!" With an instantaneousness touchingly significant of his hard heart-hunger, an attack of impassioned sighing seizes the young Siegfried. "Oh, lovely song! Oh, sweetest breath! How its message glows within my breast, burning me! How it sets my enkindled heart to throbbing! What is it rushing so wildly through my heart and senses? . . . It drives me, exulting, out of the woods to the mountain-rock. Speak to me again, charming singer: shall I break through the fiery wall? Can I waken the bride?" "Never," replies the bird, "shall the bride be won, Brünnhilde wakened, by a faint-heart! Only by one who knows no fear!" Siegfried shouts with delight: "The stupid boy who knows no fear—little bird, why, that am I! This very day I gave myself fruitless pains to learn it from Fafner. I now burn with the desire to learn it from Brünnhilde! How shall I find the way to her rock?" The bird forsakes the tree-top, flutters over the youth's head and flies further. Siegfried interprets this as an invitation. "Thus is the way shown me. Wherever you fly, I follow your flight!" We see him going hither and thither in his attempt to follow the erratic flight of a bird. His guide after a moment bends in a definite direction and Siegfried disappears after him among the trees.

III

A wild region at the foot of a rocky mountain, the mountain at the summit of which Brünnhilde sleeps. In night and storm Wotan the Wanderer comes to seek Erda, the Wise Woman, the Wala. He conjures her up from the depths of the earth into his presence. We see her appear, as before, rising in the gloom of a rocky hollow up to half her height.

In all his wandering over the earth, in search of wisdom and counsel, none has Wotan found so wise as she. The question he proposes is: How may a rolling wheel be arrested in its course?

Erda is not willingly waked out of her sleep, nor is it her wont to communicate directly with the upper world. In her slow and solemn sleep-weighted tones, she tells him that the Norns spin into their coil the visions of her illuminated sleep. Why does he not consult them? Or why, she asks, when that counsel is rejected, why does he not, still more aptly, consult Brünnhilde, wise child of Wotan and Erda?

In his reply, Wotan briefly sums Brünnhilde's offence: She defied the Storm-compeller, where he was practising the utmost self-compulsion; what the Leader of Battle yearned to do, but refrained from, his own antagonist,—all too confident, the insolent maid dared to bring about for herself.

At the indication of Brünnhilde's fate, indignation possesses the Wala. In view of such high-handed injustice, she wishes and struggles to return back into the earth and be merged with her wisdom in sleep. But Wotan will not release her until she has satisfied him. "You, all-knowing one, once drove the thorn of care into Wotan's daring heart; with the dread of an adverse ignominious ending you filled him by your fore-

SIEGFRIED

knowledge, so that his courage was in bondage to fear. If you are the wisest woman in the world, tell me now: how shall the god overcome that care?" But the injured mother is not to be conciliated. "You are not," she startingly announces, "what you call yourself!"—Not a god, Wotan?—"What are you come, wild and turbulent spirit, to disturb the Wala's sleep? Restless one, release me! Loose the spell!" "You are not," he retorts, "what you suppose yourself!"—Not the wisest of women! In that she has not divined what he has really come to impart, rather than seriously to ask counsel. For his true errand is to show her the fruits of time in himself, the mood of patience and reconciliation he has reached, nay, of hope for a future in which he is to have no part, that Brünnhilde's mother may sleep the more quietly, and, untroubled, watch the end overtake him through her dream. "Do you know what it is Wotan wills? I speak it in your ear, unforeseeing one, that with easy heart you may return to your eternal sleep. The thought of the end of the gods no longer grieves me, since it is my desire and my will! The thing which I once, in pain and conflict, torn by despair, resolved, I now joyfully and freely carry out: in raging disgust I once devoted the world to the ill-will of the Nibelung; to the joyous Wälsung I now appoint my inheritance. He whom I have chosen, but who has never known me, an intrepid boy, unaided by counsel of mine, has conquered the Nibelung's Ring. Void of envy, happy and loving, Alberich's curse falls away crippled when it would light on the noble one, for fear is unknown to him. She whom you bore to me, Brünnhilde, shall be tenderly waked by the hero; awake, your wise child shall perform a world-delivering deed! Wherefore, sleep! Close your eye: dreaming watch my passing! Whatever works be theirs, to that Eternally Young One, the god in gladness yields his place.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Down, then, Erda! Ancient Fear! Original Care! To your eternal sleep! Down! Down! . . ." Erda sinks into the earth, the glimmering light fades from the cave.

A bird-note is heard, light and sharp, approaching. A bird flutters into sight and Siegfried, following it, appears upon the scene. The bird, as if at the recognition of danger,—the ravens of Wotan are hovering near—in all haste flies quite away. Siegfried resolves to go on alone. He is stopped by the Wanderer's voice: "Whither, boy, does your way lead you?" Here is some one, thinks Siegfried, who may show him the way. "I seek a rock," he replies; "it is surrounded by fire; there sleeps a woman whom I wish to wake." "Who bade you seek the rock? Who taught you to wish for the woman?" "A little woodland bird told me about it in his singing; he gave me good tidings." "A little bird gossips of many things, but no one can understand him. How did you derive the meaning of his song?" "That was the effect of the blood of a wild dragon, . . ." and so forth. Wotan continues to ply the youth with questions, just as a kind old grandfather of humankind might lead on a child to talk, for the simple sake of hearing what he will say, for delight in his ingenuousness. The utmost tenderness for this joyous Wälsung speaks in the tones of the greybeard. The final object of his questioning is to lead the youth to some acknowledgment of himself as a factor in his fortunes. Without discarding his incognito, he longs to hear on the grandson's lips some name which stands for himself, some reference to him. So, from the question, "Who prompted you to attack the strong Worm?" he passes to the question: "Who shaped the sword, so sharp and hard, that the strongest enemy should succumb to its stroke?" and when Siegfried replies that he did this himself, insists further: "But who shaped the strong pieces, out of which you forged the sword?" The answer to

SIEGFRIED

this is, "Wälse!" It can be nothing else. Siegfried, however, replies: "What do I know? All I know is that the pieces could be of no use to me until I forged the sword over again for myself." Wotan breaks out laughing: "I agree with you!" Siegfried suspecting that he has been quizzed, loses his patience, becomes curt and rough. "What are you laughing at me? Old questioner, you had better stop. Do not keep me chattering here! If you can direct me on my way, speak. If you cannot, hold your mouth!" Deplorable are the manners learned in Mime's cave. "Patience, you boy!" Wanderer mildly checks him; "if I seem old to you, you should offer me reverence!" "That," jeers Siegfried, "is a fine idea! All my life long an old man has stood in my way. I have no more than swept him away. If you continue to stand there stiffly opposing me, beware, I tell you, lest you fare like Mime!" As, with this threat, he takes a stride nearer to the stranger, he is struck by his appearance. "What makes you look like that?" he asks, like a child; "what a great hat you have! Why does it hang down so over your face? . . . One of your eyes, beneath the brim, is missing. . . . It was put out, I am sure, by some one whose passage you were stubbornly opposing. Now, take yourself off, or you might easily lose the other!" The indulgent grandsire is still not stirred from his patience, though this must strike a little painfully on his heart. "I see, my son, that, unencumbered by any knowledge, you are quick at disposing of obstacles. With the eye which is missing from my other socket, you yourself are looking at the single eye which I have left for sight." At this riddle, the brilliant Wälsung eyes merely flash mirth, while Siegfried laughs at the obscure saying. Not a moment does he waste in reflection upon it, but, with growing impatience to resume his quest, orders Wanderer to guide him or be thrust out of his road. "If

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

you knew me, bold stripling," the suffering god speaks, still gently, "you would spare me this affront. Close to my heart as you are, your threatening strikes me painfully. Though I have ever loved your luminous race, my anger has before this brought terror upon them. You, toward whom I feel such kindness,—you, all-too-bright!—do not to-day move me to anger. . . . It might destroy both you and me!" All that is plain to Siegfried, mad to be off in search of his sleeper, is that this prattling old personage neither tells him his way nor will consent to move out of it. As he once more rudely bids him clear the path to the sleeping woman, Wotan's anger breaks forth: "You shall not," he exclaims, "go the way the bird pointed!" "Hoho! You forbiddet! . . ." cries Siegfried, amazed, "who are you, trying to prevent me?" "Fear the Guardian of the Rock! My power it is which holds the maid under the spell of sleep. He who awakes her, he who wins her, makes me powerless for ever!"

Wotan, it would seem, is challenging the boy. His anger, justified though it would be by the stalwart cub's behaviour, is half affected. He had declared not far from this very spot, some eighteen years earlier, that no one who feared his spear should ever cross the barrier of fire. The hour is at hand when the spear must offer itself to be braved by this incarnate courage bent upon that same adventure,—when Wotan must take the chances of discovering that this boy is freer than he—the god. He had declared himself but a moment ago, in his communication with Erda, willing to yield his supremacy to the Eternally Young One. Actually to do it must be a little bitter, after enduring that Young One's cavalier treatment. Perhaps—the text admits of the interpretation,—Wotan is sincerely angry; at Siegfried's impertinence he has changed his mind in respect to yielding his throne to him, and with a real intention of

SIEGFRIED

driving him back from the rock describes the terrors of the mountain: "A sea of fire surges around the woman; hot flames lick the rock; the conflagration rages against him who would push through to the bride. Look up toward the heights! Do you see not the light? . . . It is waxing in brightness. . . . Scorching clouds, wavering flames, roaring and crackling, stream down toward us. A sea of light shines about your head, Soon the fire will catch and devour you. . . . Then, back! mad child!" "Back yourself, you braggart!" cries Siegfried, nothing deterred; "up there where the flames flicker, I must hasten to Brünnhilde!" He is about to push past, when Wotan holds his spear across the path: "If the fire does not frighten you, my spear shall stop your way. My hand still holds the staff of sovereignty. The sword which you swing was once shattered against this shaft, again let it snap on the eternal spear!" Instead of appalling him, the majestic threat creates in Siegfried eagerness and glee: "My father's enemy! Do I find you here? Excellently this happens for my revenge! Swing your spear! With my sword I will split it to pieces!" And he immediately does as he has said. Nothing, it seems, not the spear of the law, can stand against the sword of perfect courage. A clap of thunder accompanies the sundering of the spear. The broken pieces roll at the Wanderer's feet. He picks them quietly up. With godlike calm, the hour having struck, he accepts inevitable fate. The motif of downfall points this beginning of the end of the gods. "Go your way! I cannot hold you!" He vanishes in darkness.

"With broken weapon the coward has fled?" says Siegfried, looking about for his father's enemy. The magic fire, as if to force the intruder back, has been pouring further and further down the mountain-side. But the one whom it should frighten rejoices, glories in the glory of the flames, jubilates. "Ha!

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Delightful glow! Beaming brightness! A radiant road lies open before me! Oh, to bathe in the fire! In the fire to find the bride! Hoho! Hoho! Hahei! Hahei! Merrily! Merrily! This time I shall lure a dear companion!" He sets the silver horn to his lips and gaily blowing the Lock-weise starts up the mountain and is lost among the swirling sanguine smoke-clouds. The fire burns bright; the merry call is heard from time to time from the unseen climber. The fire pales—the barrier has been past, the region above is reached, the charmed sleeper's domain. When the veiling smoke completely clears, we see the remembered scene of the Valkyries' rock, and Brünnhilde lying under the spreading pine, as Wotan left her.

It is calm golden daylight. Over the brow of the mountain appears Siegfried and stands still a moment, outlined against the cloudless sky, wondering at the peace, the airiness, considering the "exquisite solitude on the sunny height!" The sweet Fricka-motif speaks aloud as it were the unconscious language of his blood, voices the vague instinct toward nest-building which in the Spring lightly turns a young man's fancy to thoughts of love. He has come in search of a bride, upon the word of a little bird; but his ideas concerning the promised "dear companion" are so few, and the novelty of all he is seeing so takes up his mind, that when his eyes presently fall upon the recumbent form his first thought is not that here must be what he has come in search of.

He approaches and marvels at the bright armour. He lifts off the great shield, again like a child, to see what it covers. A man in suit of mail! He can see the face in part only, but warms with instantaneous pleasure in its comeliness. The helmet, he surmises, must press uncomfortably on the beautiful head. Very gently he takes it off. Long curling locks,

SIEGFRIED

loosed from confinement, gush abundantly forth. Siegfried is startled by the sight. But the right words, "How beautiful!" rise to his untaught lips. He remains sunk in contemplation of the marvel; the tresses remind him of a thing he has often watched: shimmering clouds bounding with their ripples a clear expanse of sky. As if drawn by a magnet, he bends lower over the quiet form and so feels the sleeper's breath. "The breast heaves with the swelling breath, shall I break the cramping corslet?" Cautiously he makes the attempt, but, finding his fingers unapt at the task, solves his difficulty by aid of Nothung. With delicate care he cuts through the iron and lightly removes the corslet. "This is no man!" he cries, starting away in amazement. Such emotion seizes him, with sensations of dizziness and faintness—such a pressure on the heart, forcing from it burning sigh upon sigh, that, with a sense of having no resource in himself, he casts about for help in this all so unfamiliar exquisite distress: "Whom shall I call on that he may save me? Mother! Mother! Remember me!" Swooning, he sinks with his forehead against Brünnhilde's breast—to be roused again by the goad of his desire to see the eyes of the sleeper unclose. "That she should open her eyes?" He hesitates, in tender trouble. "Would her glance not blind me? Have I the hardihood? Could I endure the light? . . ." He feels the hand trembling with which he is trying to quiet his agitated heart. "What ails me, coward? Is this fear? Oh, mother! Mother! Your bold child! A woman lies folded in slumber, . . . she has taught him to be afraid! . . . How shall I bring this fear to an end? How shall I gain back my courage? That I may myself awake from this dream I must waken the maid!" But awe of the so august and quiet sleeper again restrains him. He does not touch her, but lingeringly gazes at her "blossoming mouth," bows till the warm fragrance

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

of her breath sweeping his face forces forth his impulsive cry: "Awake! Awake! Sacred woman!" He waits with suspended breath. She has not heard. She does not stir. An infinite weakness overtaking him, a mortal coming less, "I will drink life," he sighs, "from sweetest lips, though I should swoon to death in the act!" With closed eyes he bends over Brünnhilde's lips.

Twelve bars, the tempo of which is marked "*Sehr mässig*," very moderate, sing themselves delicately and gravely to an end. Brünnhilde opens wide her eyes. Siegfried starts from her, not guiltily or to move from his place, only to stand erect and, absorbed, watch her movements.

Slowly she rises to a sitting posture and with beatific looks takes account of the glorious world to which she has reawakened. Solemnly she stretches her arms toward the sky: "Hail to thee, sun!" A great pause, of drinking in further the loveliness of the scene and the joy of life returned to, then: "Hail to thee, light!" And after another great pause of wondering ecstasy: "Hail to thee, radiant day! . . . Long was my sleep. . . . I am awake. . . . Who is the hero that has awakened me?" Siegfried stands spell-bound, in solemn awe at the sound of her voice and the superhuman splendour of her beauty. He answers, in the only way he knows, childlike, direct: "I pressed through the fire which surrounded the rock; I released you from the close helmet; Siegfried I am called who have awakened you!" At the sound of the name, the altogether right one, Brünnhilde takes up again her song of praise: "Hail to you, gods! Hail to thee, world! Hail, sumptuously blooming earth!" And Siegfried breaks forth, in an exalted rapture which inspires his ignorance with expression befitting the hour: "Oh, hail to the mother who bore me, hail to the earth which nourished me, that I might behold

SIEGFRIED

the eyes which now shine upon me, blessed!" Brünnhilde, joining in his hymn of gratitude, blesses, too, the mother who bore him, and the earth which nourished him, whose eyes alone should behold her, for whom alone she was destined to awake. The love-scene following leaves a singular impression of greatness. The wise daughter of the Wala and the "most splendid hero of the world" are simple as children, sincere as animals or angels, ardent with honest natural fire, like stars. When their love finally reaches a perfect understanding their song is a succession of magnificent shouts, primitive as they are thrilling.

"Oh, if you knew, joy of the world," Brünnhilde exposes her artless heart to the hero, "how I have loved you from all time! You were my care, the object of my solicitude! Before you were shaped, I nurtured you, before you were born, my shield concealed you,—so long have I loved you, Siegfried!" He believes for a moment that his mother has not died but has been sleeping and now speaks to him. In correcting him, Brünnhilde shows herself tenderly feminine. No sooner has she spoken the words which must fall with inevitable dreariness on his ear, "Your mother will not come back to you!" than she hastens to heal his hurt with the sweetest thing her love has to say: "Yourself am I, if you love me, fortunate. . . ." She explains the meaning of her earlier words: "I have loved you from all time, for to me alone Wotan's thought was known. That thought which I must never speak, which I did not think, but only felt; for which I strove, struggled, and fought; for which I braved the one who had framed it; for which I was made to suffer and bound in punishment; that thought—might you but grasp it!—was naught but love for you!"

It could hardly be hoped that the young forester should at this moment be able to grasp anything so subtle, as he help-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

lessly confesses: "Wonderful sounds what you winningly sing; but the sense of it is dark to me. I see your eye beam bright; I feel your warm breath; I hear the sweet singing of your voice; but that which in your singing you would impart, stupefied, I understand it not! I cannot grasp the sense of distant things, when all my senses are absorbed in seeing and feeling only you. With anxious fear you bind me: you alone have taught me to fear. Whom you have bound in mighty bonds, no longer withhold from me my courage!" Brünnhilde at this, with the touch of nature which makes the Valkyrie kin to the young lady of drawing-rooms, turns her head away and talks of something else. She talks of Grane, whom she sees grazing a little way off. As her eyes fall upon the corslet, cut from her body with a sword, the sight smites upon her saddeningly, as a symbol. A consciousness of danger and defencelessness oppresses her, and when Siegfried, made bold in his fear of her by the very need he feels of overcoming that fear, impetuously seizes her in his arms, in terror she starts away from him and wrings her hands with a woful sense of not being any more that Brünnhilde "whom no god had ever approached, before whom reverently the heroes had bowed, who holy had departed from Walhalla." She feels her wisdom forsaking her, her light failing, night and terror closing down upon her. She appeals to him at last against himself: "Oh, Siegfried, see my distress!"

He stands so still for a time, silent, puzzled by her, unwilling certainly to frighten her further, that her immediate fear subsides; her countenance betrays, the stage-directions read, that "a winning picture rises before her soul." The character of this may be divined from the melody rippling softly forth, the motif of peaceful love. A fresh green branch, it makes one think of, with a nest upon it, swinging in a summer wind. More gently she addresses him, pleading rather than repelling,

SIEGFRIED

winning him to give up his way for hers. "Eternal am I, . . . but eternal for your weal! Oh, Siegfried, joyous hero! Renounce me. . . . Approach me not with ardent approach. . . . Constrain me not with shattering constraint. . . . Have you not seen your own image in the clear stream? Has it not gladdened you, glad one? If you stir the water into turmoil, the smooth surface is lost, you cannot see your own reflection any longer. Wherefore, touch me not, trouble me not; eternally bright then shall you shine back at yourself from me. Oh, Siegfried, luminous youth! love—yourself, and withhold from me. Destroy not what is your own!" His robust young love to this replies—after the simple outburst: "You I love, oh, might you love me! No longer have I myself, oh, had I you!"—that it matters little his image should be broken in the glorious river before him, for, burning and thirsting, he would plunge into it himself, that its waves might blissfully engulf him and his longing be quenched in the flood. It is he who appeals now, with ancient arguments, simple and telling as his blows at the dragon. When at the end of them he clasps Brünnhilde again, she does not as before wrest herself free, but laughs in joy as she feels her love surging, till it, as it seems to her, more than matches his own, and he is the one, she judges, who should feel afraid. She, indeed, asks him, does he not fear? . . . But the opposite takes place. With her love, ardent as his own, frankly given him, all his courage comes back, "And fear, alas!" he observes, a little disconcerted at the queerness of this new experience, "fear, which I never learned, —fear, which you had hardly taught me,—fear, I believe, I, dullard, have already forgotten it!" Brünnhilde laughs in delight—all of joy and laughter is their love after this up on the sunny height—and declares to the "mad-cap treasury of glorious deeds" that laughing she will love him, laughing lose the light

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

of her eyes, laughing they will accept destruction, laughing accept death! Let the proud world of Walhalla crumble to dust, the eternal tribe of the gods cease in glory, the Norns rend the coil of fate, the dusk of the gods close down,—Siegfried's star has risen, and he shall be, to Brünnhilde, for ever, everything! In equally fine and joyous ravings Siegfried's voice has been pouring forth alongside of hers; reaching at last an identical sentiment and the same note, the two rush together like flashing mountain torrents, and are lost to us behind the descending curtain.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

(DIE GOETTERDAEMMERUNG)

I

IN the Prologue of "The Twilight of the Gods" we learn from report the portion of Wotan's history which belongs between the breaking of his spear and the final events which bring about the gods' end.

At the rising of the curtain the three Norns are dimly discerned upon the well-known scene of Brünnhilde's sleep, before the entrance to the rocky hall where Siegfried and she have their dwelling. The fiery palisade around their fastness casts a faint glow upon the night. The Norns, as it were to while away the heavy hour before dawn, spin and sing. Their "spinning" consists in casting a golden coil from one to the other, after some peculiar ritual, involving fastening it to this pine-tree, winding it about that point of rock, casting it over the shoulder, northward. Their song is of no frivolous matter, but as if we should entertain ourselves recounting the Creation, the Fall of Man, the Deluge. Of the World-Ash they tell, in whose shade a well flowed, murmuring runes of wisdom; of a daring god who came to drink at the well, paying in toll one of his eyes. From the World-Ash, he, Wotan, broke a branch and fashioned it into the shaft of a spear. This he carved with runes of truth to compacts, and held it as the "haft of the world." An intrepid hero clove it asunder. Wotan thereupon com-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

manded the heroes of Walhalla to hew down the World-Ash and cut it to pieces. "High looms the castle built by giants," sings the youngest of the Norns; "there in the hall sits Wotan amid the holy clan of the gods and heroes. Wooden billets heaped to a lofty pile surround the room. That was once the World-Ash! When the wood shall burn hot and clear, when the flame shall devour the shining hall, the day of the end of the gods shall have dawned!" Wotan himself, when the danger is no longer to be averted of a dishonoured end,—if Alberich, that is, shall regain possession of the Ring,—will plunge the splinters of his defeated spear deep into Loge's breast and himself set the World-Ash ablaze.

As night begins to yield to dawn, confusion falls on the minds of the Norns; their visions, they complain, are dim. The strands of the coil become tangled between their fingers. One of them descries an angry face—Alberich's—floating before her; another becomes aware of an avenging curse gnawing at the threads of the coil. This suddenly snaps—terrific omen! Appalled, with the cry that "eternal wisdom is at an end," they vanish in search of their mother, Erda, in the earth's depths.

Day breaks. The reflection of Loge's defence pales. There greets our ear suddenly a sturdy strain, resembling something we have heard before. By analysis, we discover in it one of the Siegfried-motifs, the horn-call, but grown so robust and weighty, so firm, strong, commanding, that it hardly more than reminds us of the youthful Lock-weise, fluttering forth hopefully to find a "dear companion." The dear companion has long been found. Hard upon this motif of the grown-up Siegfried comes a wholly new motif, the motif of Brünnhilde Wedded, wonderful for its entwining tenderness, yet the elevation it combines with its immensely feminine quality. It is

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

given over and over; the instruments pass it from one to the other, like a watchword.

The two thus announced come forth into the sunrise from their chamber in the rock, Siegfried full-armed, Brünnhilde leading Grane. They are glorious in this scene of parting. A nobler passion we do not remember hearing expressed than animates them and the music which interprets their being. It is all a little more than life-size.

"To new exploits, beloved hero, how poor were my love, did I not let you go! One single care restrains me, fear of the insufficiency of all I could bestow. What I learned from the gods I have given you, a rich treasury of holy runes, but the maidenly staff of my strength the hero took from me, before whom I now bow. Despoiled of wisdom, though filled with desire to serve; rich in love, but devoid of power, oh, despise not the poor lover who can only wish you, not give you, more!"

But not all the wisdom of the Wala's daughter, not the rich treasury of runes, have availed to change Siegfried from his big incurable simplicity,—as his answer in effect declares: "More did you give me, wonder-woman, than I have capacity to retain! Be not angry that your teaching should have left me still untaught. One knowledge there is which I, none the less, hold fast: that Brünnhilde lives and is mine; one lesson I learned with ease: to think ever of Brünnhilde!"

The gift she asks of his love is that he shall think of himself, think of his great deeds, increase his glory. He bestows on her in leaving the Ring, in which the virtue is condensed of all great deeds he ever did. In exchange she gives him Grane. After offering each other, in their great mood, the consolation that to part is for them not to be parted, for where he goes there in very truth goes she, and where she remains there does he too abide, they call upon the gods to feed their eyes upon the dedi-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

cated pair they are, and with jubilant appellations for each other—Victorious light! Effulgent star! Radiant love! Radiant life!—the last good words ever exchanged between them!—they tear apart, without sorrow or foreboding. She watches him out of sight. The stage-directions say: "From her happy smile may be divined the appearance of the cheerfully departing hero." The emphatic phrase is heard, as he descends into the valley, in which at their first meeting (in the opera "Siegfried") they vowed that each was to the other "eternally and for ever, his inheritance and his possession, his only and his all!" The curtain closes on the Prologue.

By the music we can follow Siegfried on his journey. We know when he comes to the fire, when he comes to the Rhine. There floats to us, with the effect of a folk-song, a legend, the lament of the Rhine-nymphs for their lost gold. Sounds of warning are in the air as Siegfried approaches the Hall of the Gibichungen, but to such the hardy hero, no need to say, is fast sealed.

The curtain unclosing shows the interior of the Hall of the Gibichungen, open at the further end on the Rhine. Gunther, his sister Gutrune, and their half-brother Hagen, sit at a table set with drinking-horns and flagons.

This Hagen is the Nibelung's son of Erda's prophecy: "When the dark enemy of Love shall in wrath beget a son, the end of the gods shall not be long delayed." An allusion of Hagen's there is to his mother, as having succumbed to the craft of Alberich. On the other hand, a reference of Gunther's to Frau Grimhild, his mother and Hagen's, would seem to show that her history, whatever it may have been, bore no outward blot.

He is early old, this "child of hate," as Wotan long ago called him, sere and pallid, totally unglad and hating the glad. He

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

is the tool created by Alberich—even as Siegmund was Wotan's tool,—to win back for him the Ring. From his Nibelung father he has more than human powers and knowledge. In the conversation which we overhear between the brethren, we witness Hagen laying lines for the recapture of the Ring and Siegfried's destruction, for he, like Mime, understands that there can be no safety for him who shall unrightfully get from Siegfried the Ring, while the strong-handed fellow lives.

Gunther—whose motif betrays him, with its little effect of shallow self-satisfaction, like a jaunty toss of the head,—Gunther asks Hagen, is he not magnificent, sitting beside the Rhine, to the glory of Gibich? "It is my habit," remarks Hagen evasively, "to envy you." "Nay, for me it is to envy you, and not you me," Gunther in his pleasant humour rejoins; "true, I inherited the right of the first-born, but wisdom is yours alone, and I am, in fact, but lauding your good counsel when I inquire of my fame!" "I blame the counsel then," speaks Hagen, "for indifferent is as yet the fame. I know of high advantages which the Gibichung has not yet won. . . ." Gunther's inquiry he satisfies: "In summer ripeness and vigour I behold the stem of Gibich: you, Gunther, without wife,—you, Gutrune, still unwed." Gunther and Gutrune, struck, are silent a moment. Then Gunther inquires whom should he wed that lustre might be added to the glory of the House? "I know a woman," Hagen replies, "the most glorious in the world. On a high rock is her throne; a fire surrounds her abode; only he who shall break through the fire may proffer his suit for Brünnhilde." Gunther's mediocrity and his sense of it stand ingenuously confessed in his question: "Is my courage sufficient for the test?" "The achievement is reserved for one stronger even than you." "Who is this unparalleled champion?" "Siegfried, the son of the Wälsungen. . . .

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

He, grown in the forest to mighty size and strength, is the man I wish Gutrune for her lord." Gutrune's motif, sweet and shallow, like Gunther's betrays her; an innocent admission of mediocrity, too, is in her exclamation: "You mocker! Unkind Hagen! How should I be able to attach Siegfried to me?" She is unsure of her feminine charm as her brother of his manly courage. As he finds nothing repugnant in the proposition to win his bride through another, so she accepts to win her love through a magic potion. Gunther, Gutrune, and Hunding are the only plain human beings in the drama of the Ring, and certainly they produce the effect of rampant creatures among winged ones. Acquiescently Gutrune hears Hagen's suggestion: "Remember the drink in the cupboard; trust me who provided it. By means of it, the hero whom you desire shall be bound to you by love. Were Siegfried now to enter, were he to taste the spiced drink, that he ever saw a woman before you, that ever a woman approached him, he must totally forget!" Thus they have it planned: Siegfried shall by a love-potion be won to Gutrune, and, as a task by which to obtain her from her brother, shall be deputed to fetch Brünnhilde for him from her flame-surrounded heights. Hagen is alone, of the three, to know of the tie existing between Siegfried and Brünnhilde. But, "How shall we find him?" very pertinently asks Gunther. While storming light-heartedly about the world in search of adventures, it can hardly be, Hagen judges, but that he shall come too to Gibich's shore on the Rhine. Even while he is speaking, Siegfried's horn is heard in the distance. Hagen from the riverside describes the figure he sees approaching: "In a boat, a hero and a horse: he it is, so merrily blowing the horn. By an easy stroke, as if with an idle hand, he drives the craft against the stream." (We hear that easy stroke of the idle hand,—the power and gaiety of Siegfried are in it; it

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

has a family resemblance to the horn-call.) "So vigorous a hand at the swinging of the scull he alone can boast who slew the dragon. It is Siegfried, surely no other!" Hagen makes a speaking-tube of his hands: "Hoiho! Whither, blithesome hero?" "To the strong son of Gibich!" comes answer from the river. "Here! Here come ashore! Hail, Siegfried, beloved hero!" The hero lands. As he stands at the entrance, holding Grane by the bridle, with the unconstraint of ancient manners they all quietly before speaking take one another's measure with their eyes. Siegfried's fame has preceded him. He is known as the slayer of the dragon, the possessor of the Hort, and commander of the Nibelungen. "Which is the son of Gibich?" he inquires. Gunther presents himself. "I heard you lauded far down the Rhine," Siegfried says; and, with the fresh directness again of ancient manners: "Either fight with me, or be my friend!" As we see him for the first time among common mortals, we perceive the effect of high elegance which pertains to Siegfried's calm, his careless perfect strength and simplicity. Gutrune who has not removed her marvelling gaze from him since his entrance, withdraws—to prepare the drink. As Hagen takes his horse to stable, Siegfried charges him, while a dear memory sings in his heart: "Take good care of Grane for me. Never did you hold by the bridle a horse of nobler breed!"

Magnificent is Gunther in expressions of welcome to the great guest: "Joyfully hail, O hero, the Hall of my fathers! The ground you tread, all you see, regard as your own. Yours is my inheritance, yours are my land and my people. To these add my body. I offer myself as your vassal." Siegfried replies: "I offer neither land nor people; no father's mansion nor court. My sole inheritance is my own body, which I expend day by day in living. Nothing have I but a sword, forged by

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

myself. . . . This I pledge with myself to our alliance." Hagen, overhearing, ventures: "Yet report calls you possessor of the Nibelungen-Hort. . . ." And Siegfried: "I had almost forgotten the treasure, so do I prize its idle wealth! I left it lying in a cave where it once was guarded by a dragon." (The reason is clear why the curse must drop away crippled, powerless to blight this free nature, unenfeebled by covetousness as by fear!) "And you brought away no part of it?" "This metal-work, unaware of its use." Hagen recognises the Tarnhelm and explains its virtues. "And you took from the Hort nothing further?" "A ring." "You have it no doubt in safe keeping?" "It is in the keeping of a gracious woman," Siegfried replies dreamily.

Bashful, blushing, tremulous, as different as is well possible from Brünnhilde, Guttrune approaches, holding a filled drinking-horn. "Welcome, guest, in Gibich's house! His daughter offers you drink!"

Siegfried holds the cup before him a moment without drinking, his thoughts flying afar. The words come back to him spoken to Brünnhilde at parting. An infinite tenderness invades him. "Though I should forget all you ever taught me," he murmurs, "one teaching I shall still hold fast. My first draught, to faithful love, Brünnhilde, I drink to you!" With which secret toast to the absent beloved he sets the horn to his lips and drains it—to the motif of Evil Enchantment, the motif of the Cup of Forgetfulness, closely resembling the Tarnhelm-motif, but sweeter,—cruel as a treacherous caress. This whole passage, surpassingly exquisite to the ear, is painful to the heart as hardly another in the opera, fertile as this is in tragic moments. It marks the end of so much happiness.

When Siegfried's eyes, as he returns the cup to Gibich's daughter, rest upon her, it is, as Hagen had foretold, as if he

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

had never before beheld a woman. The inflammable heart which suffocated him of old at sight of Brünnhilde asleep, now makes his voice falter with instantaneous passion as he exclaims: "You, whose beauty dazzles like lightning, wherefore do you drop your eyes before me?" And when shyly she looks up: "Ha, fairest woman, hide your glance! Its beam scorches the heart within my breast—Gunter, what is your sister's name? . . . Gutrune! . . . Are they *good runes* which I read in her eye? . . ." Impetuously he seizes her hand: "I offered myself to your brother as his vassal, the haughty one repelled me; will you exhibit the same arrogance toward me, if I offer myself as your ally?" She cannot answer, for the confusion of joy which overwhelms her; signifying by a gesture her unworthiness of this high honour, with unsteady step she leaves the room. Siegfried, closely observed by the other two, gazes lingeringly after her, fast-bewitched. Some sketch of a project for winning her it must be prompting his next words: "Have you, Gunter, a wife?" "Not yet have I courted, and hardly shall I rejoice in a wife! I have set my heart upon one whom no well-advised endeavour can win for me!" "In what can you fail," speaks Siegfried's brisk assurance, "if I stand by you?" "Upon a high rock is her throne, a fire surrounds her abode," Gunter in hopeless tone describes the forbidding circumstances. "Upon a high rock is her throne, a fire surrounds her abode, . . ." Siegfried rapidly says the words after him, which his lips know so strangely well. "Only he who breaks through the fire . . ." "Only he who breaks through the fire, . . ." Siegfried is visibly making a tremendous effort to remember, to account for the something so curiously familiar in the image evoked. "May be Brünnhilde's suitor. . . ." By this, the cup of forgetfulness has completely done its work,—the name suggests to him nothing, the effort itself to remember is forgotten. "But

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

not for me," sighs Gunther, "to climb the rock; the fire will not die down for me!" "I fear no fire! I will win the woman for you," Siegfried declares, "for your man am I, and my valour is yours, if I may obtain Gutrune for my wife!" Gutrune is promised him. It is Siegfried's heated brain—for the first time fruitful in stratagem—which throws off the plan to deceive this strange woman up in the fire-girdled fastness of whom they tell him, by means of the Tarnhelm, which lends the wearer any shape he wish to adopt. The future brothers swear "blood-brotherhood," pledging their truth in wine, into which each has let trickle a drop of his blood. "If one of the brothers shall break the bond, if one of the friends shall betray his faithful ally, let that which in kindness we drink to-day by drops gush forth in streams, sacred reparation to the friend!" They clasp hands upon the compact, and Hagen with his sword cleaves in two the drinking-horn. "Why," it occurs to Siegfried, "did not you, Hagen, join in the oath?" "My blood would have spoiled the drink," replies the joyless man; "it does not flow noble and untroubled like yours; cold and morose it stagnates in me, and will not colour my cheek. Wherefore I keep afar from the fiery league." The ancient conception of the power of a vow, as of the power of a curse, is interestingly illustrated in this story. The effectiveness of a vow, as we discover, has nothing to do with persons or circumstances; an oath becomes a sort of independent creation with a precise operation of its own. Hagen, capable of any breach of faith, meditating nothing but treachery, dare not join in the formality of the oath because of sure and deadly danger in breaking it. Siegfried deceives Gunther without intending or knowing it, yet his blood must "gush forth in streams" as appointed, to wash out his offence.

Siegfried is for starting without delay on the quest: "There is

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

my skiff; it will take us quickly to the rock; one night you shall wait in the boat on the shore, then shall you lead home the bride."

The Hall is left in Hagen's care. Followed by Guttrune's eyes, the heroes hurry off. Hagen places himself with spear and shield in the doorway, and, while sitting there sentinel-wise, reflects upon the success of his devices: "Blown along by the wind, the son of Gibich goes a-wooing. Helmsman to him is a strong hero, who is to brave danger in his stead. His own bride this latter will bring for him to the Rhine, but to me he will bring—the Ring! You frank good fellows, light-hearted companions, sail cheerfully on! Abject though he may seem to you, you are yet his servants—the servants of the Nibelung's son!" The curtain closes.

When it reopens we see the scene once more of Siegfried's and Brünnhilde's leave-taking. Brünnhilde sits sunk in contemplation of the Ring and the memories attached to it. Distant thunder disturbs her dreams; her ear seizes a familiar sound, not heard for many a day, the gallop of an approaching air-horse. Her name comes borne on the wind. She rushes to receive Waltraute, whose call she has joyfully recognised. In her delight, she does not at once take account of the Valkyrie's sorrowful and preoccupied mien. She presses rapid questions upon her: "You dared then for love of Brünnhilde brave Walvater's commandment? Or—how? Oh, tell me! Has Wotan's disposition softened toward me? When I protected Siegmund against the god, while it was a fault, I know that I was fulfilling his wish. I know, too, that his anger was appeased, for even though he sealed me in slumber, left me bound on a rock, to be the bondmaid of the man who should find and wake me, yet he granted favour to the prayer of my terror, he surrounded the rock with a devouring fire which should close the way to the base. Thus was I through my punishment made

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

happy! The most splendid of heroes won me for wife. In the light of his love to-day I beam and laugh!" With uncontrolled joy she embraces the sister, unconscious of the latter's impatience and shy attempt to repel her. "Did my fate, sister, allure you? Have you come to pasture your sight upon my bliss, to share that which has befallen me?"

The suggestion is verily too much! "To share the tumult which, insensate, possesses you? A different matter it is which impelled me, fearful, to break Wotan's commandment. . . ." Brünnhilde wakes to the sister's troubled looks, but she can still think of but one reason for them. "The stern one has not forgiven? You stand in terror of his anger?" "Had I need to fear him—there would be a term to my fear!" "Amazed, I do not understand you!" "Master your agitation, listen attentively. The terror which drove me forth from Walhalla, drives me back thither. . . ." "What has happened to the eternal gods?" cries Brünnhilde, at last alarmed. Waltraute unfolds to her then the sorrowful plight of the gods, making her even over the events in Walhalla since her cutting off from the eternal dynasty. She describes Walvater returning home from his wanderings with his broken spear, the erection around the Hall of the Blessed of the funeral pile cut from the World-Ash, the assembling about Wotan's throne of the gods and heroes. "There he sits, speaks no word, the splinters of the spear clenched in his hand. Holda's (Freia's) apples he will not touch. Fear and amazement bind the gods. His ravens both he has sent ranging; should they return with good tidings, then once again—for the last time!—the god would divinely smile. Claspings his knees lie we Valkyries; he is blind to our entreating looks. I pressed weeping against his breast, his glance wavered—Brünnhilde, he thought of you! Deeply he sighed; he closed his eyes and as if in dream he breathed forth

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

the words: "If to the daughters of the deep Rhine she would restore the Ring, delivered from the weight of the curse were the gods and the world!" I bethought me then; from his side, between the rows of silent heroes, I stole. In secret haste I mounted my horse and rode upon the storm to you. You, oh, my sister, I now conjure: that which lies in your power, bravely do it,—end the misery of the Immortals!"

Brünnhilde speaks to her pityingly and gently; it is so long since she emerged from the vapour-dimmed atmosphere of her heavenly home that she receives no clear impression, she owns, of the affair related to her; but: "What, pale sister, do you crave from me?"

"Upon your hand, the ring—that is the one! Listen to my counsel, for Wotan's sake cast it from you!" "The ring? Cast it from me?" "To the Rhine-daughters give it back!" "To the Rhine-daughters, I, this ring? Siegfried's love-token? Are you mad?"

Brünnhilde is unshaken by Waltraute's insistence. Good or bad arguments have nothing to do with the case, as it stands in her feeling. Indignation possesses her at the bare notion of the exchange proposed to her, out of all reason and proportion: Siegfried's love, of which his ring is the symbol, for Walhalla's and the world's peace! "Ha! do you know what the ring is to me? How should you grasp it, unfeeling maid? More than the joys of Walhalla, more than the glory of the Immortals, is to me this ring; one look at its clear gold, one flash of its noble lustre, I prize more than the eternally enduring joy of all the gods, for it is Siegfried's love which beams at me from the ring! Oh, might I tell you the bliss. . . . And that bliss is safeguarded by the ring. Return to the holy council of the gods; inform them, concerning my ring: Love I will never renounce; they shall never take love from me, not though Walhalla the radi-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

ant should crash down in ruins!" When Waltraute with cries of "Woe!" flees to horse, she looks after her unmoved: "Lightning-charged cloud, borne by the wind, go your stormy way! Nevermore steer your course toward me!" She has no regrets; the request has been in her judgment so monstrous that it has hardened and shut her heart toward those who made it. She gazes quietly over the landscape. Her sense of security in Siegfried's love is no doubt at its firmest in these moments following her fiery defence of it, her sacrifice to it of old allegiances. The very peace of possession is upon her.

Twilight has fallen; the guardian fire glows more brightly as the darkness thickens. Of a sudden, the flames leap high,—Loge's signal that some one draws near. At the same moment Siegfried's horn is heard, approaching. With the cry: "In my god's arm!" Brünnhilde rushes to meet him.

A figure springs from the flames upon a rock, a form foreign to Brünnhilde's eyes. The flames drop back. The figure remains, dark against the dim glow of the sky. His head and the greater part of his face are concealed by a helmet of curious fashion; she does not, in the uncertain light, recognise the Tarnhelm. The fact itself of his being there is terrifying, arguing some singular treachery somewhere. "Treason!" is Brünnhilde's first cry, as she recoils and from a distance stares breathlessly at the sinister intruder. He stands motionless, leaning upon his shield and regarding her. "Who is it that has forced his way to me?" she gasps. He is silent still; the horror of him is increased by his silence and motionlessness and his metal mask. The motif of evil enchantment is woven through the whole of this scene. In a hard masterful voice he speaks at length: "Brünnhilde! A suitor is come whom your fire does not alarm! I seek you for my wife; follow me unresistingly." It is all so strange, so like the agonising im-

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

possibilities of a dream,—Brünnhilde falls to trembling. "Who are you, dreadful one? Are you a mortal? Do you come from Hella's army of the night?" Still watching her, motionless on his point of vantage, he replies: "A Gibichung am I, and Gunther is the hero's name, whom, woman, you must follow." It flashes upon Brünnhilde that this, this must have been the true point of Wotan's punishment. When the figure springs from the rock and approaches her, she raises, to hold him off, the hand with Siegfried's ring. "Stand back! Fear this sign! . . . Stronger than steel I am made by this ring; never shall you rob me of it!" "You teach me," he replies, with his dark calm, "to detach it from you!" He reaches for it, she defends it. They wrestle. She escapes from him with a victorious cry. He seizes her again. The former Valkyrie, reinforced by the Ring, is a match very nearly for the stalwart Walsung. A shriek is heard. He has caught her hand, and draws the ring from her finger. As if all her strength had been in it and were gone with its loss, she sinks, broken, in the arms of the disguised Siegfried. He coldly lets her down upon the seat of rock. "Now you are mine, Brünnhilde,—Gunther's bride. Withhold not your favour from me now!" She cowers, shattered and stupefied, murmuring, "How could you have helped yourself, miserable woman!" The right of the stronger she recognises, primitive woman, as a right. Fairly vanquished, she must accept the fate of battle,—no dignity, as no success, would pertain to further struggle. When with a gesture of command he points her to her stone chamber, trembling and with faltering step she obeys. Siegfried, following, draws his sword and in his natural voice again, smooth and happy, addresses it: "Now, Nothung, do you bear witness to the restraint which marks my wooing. Guarding my truth to my brother, divide me from his bride!"

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

II

The Hall of the Gibichungen once more, seen from the outside. It is night. Hagen sits as we left him, in guard over the hall. He sleeps leaning against a pillar of the portal. A burst of moonlight shows Alberich crouching before him. "Are you asleep, Hagen, my son? Are you asleep and deaf to my voice, whom sleep and rest have forsaken?" "I hear you, harassed spirit; what message have you for my sleep?" Remember! remember! is the burden of Alberich's communication. Be true to the task for the purpose of which you were created. The old enemy, Wotan, is no longer to be feared; he has been made powerless by one of his own race. The object now singly to be kept in view is the destruction of this latter, and capture of the Ring in his possession. Quickly it must be done, for "a wise woman there is, living for love of the Wälsung; were she to bid him restore the Ring to the Rhine-daughters, for ever and ever lost were the gold!" "The Ring I will have!" Hagen quiets the care-ridden Nibelung, "rest in peace!" "Do you swear it to me, Hagen, my hero?" "I swear it to myself!" Dawn has been creeping over the sky. The form of Alberich fades in the growing light and his voice dies on the ear: "Be faithful, Hagen, my son, be faithful—faithful!" Hagen sits alone in the broadening day, seemingly asleep, yet with eyes wide open. He starts. Flushed with the morning-red, Siegfried strides up from the river-bank, uttering his joyful "Hoiho!" "Siegfried, winged hero, whence do you come so fast?" "From Brünnhilde's rock. I there took in the breath which I put forth in calling you,—so rapid was my journey. A couple follows me more slowly. Their journey is by boat. Is Gutrune awake?"

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

"Now make we welcome, Gibich's-child!" he greets her, as at Hagen's call she comes hurrying out to him. "I bring good tidings!" In exuberantly good spirits he tells them the story of his bad action. The magic draught administered to him had more than destroyed his memory of Brünnhilde, we must believe; the inflaming potion had somehow blotted out, or covered over and for the time cast into the background, his father's part in him, the part of Siegmund, who fought to the end an unequal and losing battle to save a girl from a marriage without love. "Across the expiring fire," he concludes his report, "through the mists of early dawn, she followed me from the mountain-top to the valley. At the shore, Gunther and I, in a trice, changed places, and by virtue of the Tarnhelm I wished myself here. A strong wind is even at the moment driving our dear pair up the Rhine." "Let us display all kindness in our reception of her," Gutrune proposes, with the generosity of overflowing happiness; "that she may be pleased and glad to sojourn with us here! Do you, Hagen, summon the vassals to the wedding at Gibich's court, while I will gather the women." Siegfried fondly offers her his help; hand in hand they go within.

Hagen is conscious, presumably, of an incongruity in the task assigned to him, the genial office of gathering together the clans for a wedding-feast. However that may be, he does not, to perform it, depart at all from his character. Ascending to an eminence, he blows a melancholy blast through a great steer-horn, and, in a voice portending tidings the most alarming, gives the call to arms: "Hoiho! Gibich's men! Up! Arms in the land! Danger! Danger!" In this he persists until from all sides, singly at first, then in groups and lastly in crowds, the vassals, hurriedly armed, come flocking. "Why does the horn sound? Why are we called to arms? Here we are with

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

our weapons. . . . Hagen, what danger threatens? What enemy is near? Who attacks us? Is Gunther in need of us?" "Forthwith prepare, and dally not, to receive Gunther returning home. He has wooed a wife!" This still in a tone befitting the announcement of disaster. "Is he in trouble? Is he hard pressed by the foe?" "A formidable wife he brings home!" "Is he pursued by the hostile kindred of the maid?" "He comes alone, unpursued." "The danger then is past? He has come forth victorious from the encounter?" "The dragon-slayer succoured him in his need; Siegfried, the hero, secured his safety." "How then shall his followers further help him?" "Strong steers you shall slaughter and let Wotan's altar stream with their blood." "And what, Hagen, are we to do after that?" "A boar shall you slay for Froh, a mighty ram for Donner; but to Fricka you shall sacrifice sheep, that she may bless the marriage!"

The men are beginning to penetrate through Hagen's sullen aspect to his joke; with heavy playfulness they help it on. "And when we have slaughtered the animals, what shall we do?" "From the hands of fair women take the drinking-horn, pleasantly brimming with wine and mead." "Horn in hand,—what then?" "Bravely carouse until drunkenness overwhelm you—all to the honour of the gods, that they may bless the marriage!" The rough warriors break into laughter, and in uncouth jollity stamp with their feet and spear-butts. "Great good fortune is indeed abroad on the Rhine when Hagen the grim grows jovial!" Not the faintest smile illumines the bleak face. At sight of Gunther's skiff approaching, he checks the men's laughter. Moving among them, with careful foresight he drops seed toward fruits of trouble: "Be loyal to your sovereign mistress, serve her faithfully; if she should suffer wrong, be swift to avenge her!" Hagen's plan for bring-

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

ing about Siegfried's destruction is not yet at this point settled in outline. We see him grasping at whatever can be construed into a weapon against him. There are repeated attempts on his part in the scene following to stir against Siegfried some fatal demonstration of popular anger.

The skiff draws to land. The vassals greet their lord and his bride with noisy chorus of welcome, clashing their arms together, beating their swords against their bucklers.

Brünnhilde stands beside Gunther in the boat, statue-still, her eyes bent on the ground, like one who neither sees nor hears. Without resistance she lets Gunther take her hand to help her ashore; but a suppressed snatch of the motif of Wotan's resentment suggests the shudder ominous of danger overrunning his Valkyrie daughter at the contact.

This is Gunther's hour, this for him the supreme occasion in life; the star of his destiny rides the heavens unclouded; he feels now magnificent indeed in his seat on the Rhine, as he stands before his people with the regal creature beside him whom he calls his wife. As if to express the momentary expansion of his nature, his motif resounds, as proudly he presents her, quite changed in character; it has taken on a grandeur approaching pomp: "Brünnhilde, the glory of her sex, I bring to you here on the Rhine. A nobler wife was never won! The race of the Gibichungen, by the grace of the gods, shall now tower to crowning heights of fame!" Brünnhilde does not heed or hear. When, as Gunther leads her toward the Hall, Siegfried and Guttrune meet them, coming forth from it with strains of marriage-music and a festal train of ladies, her eyes never moving from the ground, she does not see them. "Hail, beloved hero! Hail, dearest sister!" Gunther greets the bridal pair. "Joyfully I behold at your side, sister, him who has won you. Two

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

happy pairs are here met—Brünnhilde and Gunther, Gutrune and Siegfried!”

At the name, Brünnhilde looks quickly up. . . . Her astonished gaze fastens upon Siegfried's face and dwells intently upon it. Her action is so marked that Gunther drops her hand; all watch her in wonder. A murmur runs through the assembly: “What ails her? Is she out of her mind?” Brünnhilde, still speechless, falls visibly to trembling. Siegfried becomes at last aware of something out of the common in the gaze so persistently fixed upon him. He goes quietly to the woman and asks: “What trouble burdens Brünnhilde's gaze?” She has hardly power to frame words, make sounds, her emotion still further intensified by his cool and disengaged address. “Siegfried, here! . . . Gutrune!” she painfully brings forth. “Gunther's gentle sister,” he enlightens her, in his major, matter-of-fact manner, “wedded to me, as you to Gunther!” At this she recovers her voice to hurl at him startingly: “I—to Gunther? . . . A lie!” She is swooning with the helpless horror of all this monstrous mystery. Siegfried, who stands nearest, receives her as she totters, near to falling. As she lies for a moment in the well-known arms, it seems impossible, beyond everything impossible, that his unimaginable purpose should not break down, that he should not be forced to drop this incomprehensible feint of strangeness. But her dying eyes searching the face close to them discover in it no glimmer of feeling. Her heart-broken murmur: “Siegfried . . . knows me not?” touches no chord. The hero is for handing her over with all convenient haste to her proper guardian. “Gunther, your wife is ailing!” As Gunther comes, he rouses her: “Awake, woman! Here is your husband!” Because her senses seem clouded and she a moment before rejected the statement that she was married to Gunther, he

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

singles out for her with his finger the personage he means. Her eyes, as he makes this gesture, are caught by the Ring on his hand. Her mind leaps, inevitably, to the conclusion that Siegfried, who feigns not to know her, not only has cast her off, but is in collusion with this man Gunther, her captor.

Trying by a supreme effort to govern her agitation and anger at the revelation of this unspeakable baseness, till she shall have sounded the affair, "A ring I saw upon your finger," she addresses him; "not to you does it belong; it was torn from me by this man!" indicating Gunther. "How should you have received the ring from him?" Siegfried looks reflectively at the ring. Since all trace of the former Brünnhilde is wiped from his brain, he cannot remember his parting gift to her of the Ring. Certainly, he wrested a ring from this woman, in the twilight. . . . What became of it? . . . But the ring on his hand is indisputably a relic of the old days of the fight with the dragon. "I did not receive the ring from him," he replies. She turns to Gunther: "If you took from me the ring, by which you claimed me for wife, declare to him your right to it, demand back the token!" Gunther is sore perplexed. "The ring? . . . I gave him none. . . . Are you sure that is the one?" "Where do you conceal the ring," Brünnhilde presses him, "which you robbed from me?" Gunther is stupidly silent, not knowing what he should say; his confusion is so obvious and his blankness so convincingly unassumed, that the truth is borne upon Brünnhilde: It was not he, despite all appearances, who took the ring from her, and if not he—"Ha!" she cries, in a burst of furious indignation, "This is the man who tore the ring from me, Siegfried, trickster and thief!"

Siegfried has been still gazing at the ring on his hand, trying to puzzle out points which the lacunæ in his memory do not permit him to make clear. The contemplation has brought

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

back old scenes and distant events. He speaks, unruffled: "From no woman did I receive the ring; nor did I take it from any woman. Full well do I recognise the prize of battle, won by me before Neidhöhle, when I slew the mighty dragon."

With what quiet and conviction he makes the statement, as if verily he spoke the truth! Such assurance is hardly imaginable, save as based upon conscious integrity. . . . Hagen now, the fisher in troubled waters, interferes, still further to increase Brünnhilde's bewilderment: "Are you sure you recognise the ring? If it is the one you gave to Gunther, it belongs to him, and Siegfried obtained it by some artifice which the deceiver shall be made to rue!"

Plainly, there is no way of help in clearing up this desperate tangle. The goaded woman bursts into a wild outcry, sharp as a knife by which she should hope to cut through the coil in which she is caught: "Deceit! Deceit! Dastardly deceit! . . . Treachery! Treachery! such as never until this moment called for vengeance!"

Gutrune catches her breath: "Deceit? . . ." The quickly roused suspicion of the crowd takes up Brünnhilde's word: "Treachery? . . . To whom? . . ."

"Holy gods! Heavenly leaders!" Brünnhilde's madness clamours to heaven: "Did you appoint this in your councils? Do you impose upon me sufferings such as never were suffered? Do you create ignominy for me such as never was endured? Prompt me then to vengeance such as never yet raged! Enkindle anger in me such as never was quelled! Teach Brünnhilde to break her own heart that she may shatter the one who betrayed her!" The ineffectual Gunther tries vainly to hush her, to stop the scandalous scene. "Away!" she thrusts him from her, "cheat! . . . Yourself cheated!" and she announces ringingly to them all the one thing which in all this confusion she knows to be

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

true: "Not to him (Gunther) am I married, but to that man, there!"

"Siegfried? . . . Gutrune's husband?" the murmur passes through the astonished crowd.

"Love and delight he forced from me. . . ." Her momentary hatred of Siegfried thus distorts the image of the past. Siegfried's only possible interpretation of this astonishing declaration is that the Tarnhelm did not properly conceal his identity—but even so the woman is not speaking the truth. What her purpose can be in thus darkening her own fame he is at a loss to divine. He replies to her charge directly, careless at this point that the plot between Gunther and himself stands betrayed by his words. "Hear, whether I have broken my faith! Blood-brotherhood I swore to Gunther: Nothung, my worthy sword, guarded the vow of truth; its sharp blade divided me from this unhappy woman!" Brünnhilde hears him with a jeer. They are speaking at cross purposes; he, as it should be remembered, of the foregoing night alone, while she speaks of that past so wholly blotted from his mind. "Oh, wily hero! see how you lie! how ill-advisedly you call to witness your sword! I am acquainted indeed with its sharpness, but acquainted, too, with the sheath—in which, pleasantly encased, Nothung, the faithful friend, hung against the wall, while the master courted his dear!"

"How? . . . How? . . ." the agitated followers are beginning to ask. "Has he broken his word? Has he smirched Gunther's honour?" Gunther, Gutrune, the vassals, all a little shaken in their faith in Siegfried by the assurance of his accuser, press him to refute her charge, clear himself, take the oath which shall silence the disgraceful accusation. He unhesitatingly asks for a weapon upon which to swear. Hagen craftily offers his spear. Siegfried placing his right hand on

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

the point, solemnly calls upon the sacred weapon to register his oath, wording it in the following ill-omened fashion: "Where sharpness may pierce me, do you pierce me; where death shall strike me, do you strike me, if yonder woman spoke the truth, if I broke my vow to my brother!" Brünnhilde hearing, flings his hand from the spear-point, and grasping it in her own, pronounces the counter-oath: "Your weight I consecrate, spear, that it may overthrow him! Your sharpness I bless, that it may pierce him! For, having broken every vow, this man now speaks perjury!" Siegfried and Brünnhilde each believe that what he swears is true; but the Oath, the blind power which takes no account of intention, of moral right or wrong, gives right in sequence to Brünnhilde. The spear pierces the hero who invokes it so to do "if the woman spoke true."

There is nothing more, the solemn oath taken, that Siegfried can do, and in his stalwart fashion he turns his back on the whole troublesome business, with the sensible suggestion that the wild woman from the mountains be given rest and quiet "until the impudent rage shall have spent itself which some unholy wizardry has suscitated" against them all.

"You men, come away!" he subjoins, all his heroic good-humour recovered. "When the fighting is to be done with tongues, we will willingly pass for cowards!" For Gunther, whom he sees darkly brooding, he has a word in the ear: "Believe me, I am more vexed than you that I should not have more perfectly deceived her; the Tarnhelm, I could almost believe, only half disguised me. But the anger of women is soon appeased. The woman will beyond a doubt be grateful hereafter that I should have won her for you!" The winged exhilaration of the bridegroom repossessing him, he invites them all in to the wedding-feast, and casting his arm gaily around

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

Gutrune draws her along with him into the Hall—whither the people swarm after them.

The three are left outside whom no festivity can allure. In long silence they remain, sunk in gloomy study, each on his side. To attempt arriving at clearness by questions does not occur to them; and, indeed, what to each is the principal thing, known from the proof of his eyes, no discussion could affect: for Brünnhilde, Siegfried is estranged from her; for Gunther, his marriage is turned to Dead-Sea apples.

The cheerful music, the summons to the wedding, dies away. Hagen bends his black brow in reflection as to how he shall utilise to his advantage the passions he has aroused; covertly he watches his victims. Gunther has cast himself down and muffled his face from the day, in the clutch of his jealous suspicion of Siegfried and the smart of his public shame.

Brünnhilde stands staring ahead, with set countenance of horror and grief. In an hour she has lived the tragedy which, spread over howsoever many years, is still one of the hardest in human experience, the tragedy which extorted Othello's groan: "But there, where I have garnered up my heart, where either I must live or bear no life—to be discarded thence!" She seeks in the void and blackness some glimmer of light on the incredible mystery of these events. With returning calm, a flash of the truth illuminates her, to the extent that she suspects in the unnatural developments of the last hour the work of sorcery. While hardly helping the actual situation, this interpretation frees Siegfried from the hatefulness of such black guilt as has appeared his, and we feel from this moment that Brünnhilde's undeterred reaching after vengeance, her consent to Siegfried's death, is less a personal need to make an offender pay, than the instinct to cut short the dishonour in which the most magnificent hero in the world is fallen. Im-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

possible of endurance is a world where Siegfried is false to all his vows, where Siegfried and Brünnhilde are no longer each to the other "for ever and ever, his only and his all!" Heart-break much more than resentment stamps Brünnhilde's cry: "Where is my wisdom against this enigma? Where are my runes? Oh, lamentation! All my wisdom I bestowed on him. In his power he holds the bondmaid, in thongs the captive, whom, wailing over her wrong, the rich one joyously makes gift of to another! Where shall I find a sword with which to cut the thongs?"

Hagen approaches her: "Place your trust in me, deceived woman! I will avenge you on him who betrayed you. . . ."

"On whom? . . ." she inquires, hazily. *Him who betrayed you* describes more than one. "On Siegfried, who betrayed you." "On Siegfried . . . you? . . ." She laughs, bitterly, while her unquelled pride in her faithless lord mocks: "A single glance of his flashing eye, which even through the lying disguise shed its radiance upon me, and your best courage would fail you!"

"But is he not, by reason of his perjury, reserved for my spear?"

"Perjury or none, you must fortify your spear by something stronger, if you think of attacking that strongest of all!" "Well I know," the subtle Hagen, with an effect of humbleness, continues, "Siegfried's victorious strength, and how difficult to overcome him in battle; wherefore do you give me good counsel: by what device may this giant be defeated by me?"

She breaks into complaint over the shameful requital with which the love has met that, unknown to him, by charms woven all about his body, made him invulnerable.

"No weapon then can hurt him?" asks Hagen.

"No weapon that is borne in battle. . . ." But she corrects

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

herself, remembering suddenly that he might, in truth, be wounded in the back. "Never, I knew, would he retreat or in flight show his back to the foe. Upon it therefore I spared to place the spell." "And there my spear shall strike him!" determines Hagen. Having learned from her all that he need, he turns to Gunther: "Up, noble Gibichung! Here stands your strong wife. Why do you hang back there in dejection?"

Gunther breaks into passionate exclamations over the indignity he has suffered. Close indeed upon his hour of glory comes the hour of his humiliation, when he must hear from the queenly woman in whom his pride was placed such words as these: "Oh, ignoble, false companion! Behind the hero you concealed yourself, that he might gain for you the prize of courage! Low indeed has your precious race sunk, when it produces such dastards!" Gunther utters broken excuses, "while deceiving her he was himself deceived,—betraying her, he was betrayed—" and appeals to Hagen to stamp him out of life or help him to wash the stain off his honour!

Hagen has them now both where, for his purposes, he wishes them. "No brain can help you," he replies to Gunther, "nor can any hand! There is but one thing can help you—Siegfried's death!" The two words fall awfully on the air, followed by a long silence. The irresolute Gunther at the sound of the sentence writhes amid doubts and hesitations, such as do not for a moment move his stern fellow-sufferer. He remembers the blood-brotherhood sworn to Siegfried; he begins to question whether the blood-brother has in very fact been false. A returning wave of affection and admiration for the beautiful fellow calls forth a sigh, and then the thought of Gutrune: "Gutrune, to whom myself I freely gave him! If we punish her husband so, with what face shall we stand before her?" At this mention of Gutrune, a light breaks upon Brünnhilde:

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

"Gutrune! . . . is the name of the magic charm which has enchanted away from me my husband. . . . Terror smite her!" "If the manner of his death must offend her, let the deed be hidden from her," Hagen soothes Gunther's scruple. "We will to-morrow fare on a merry hunting-expedition. The noble one will, according to his impetuous wont, go ranging ahead of us, and meet his death by a wild boar."

The three, coming to a common determination upon the fall of Siegfried, are calling upon the different powers to whom they refer their deeds to hear their vows of revenge—Brünnhilde and Gunther upon Wotan, guardian of promises, Hagen upon Alberich—who through the happy working of this vow of vengeance will be master once more of the Ring—when from the Hall comes pouring forth, with music and strewing of flowers, the bridal procession. Gutrune, rose-wreathed, is borne shoulder-high upon a gilded and begarlanded throne. At the vision of her and the glowing Siegfried at her side, Brünnhilde shrinks back. Hagen forces her hand into Gunther's, and this second bridal pair falls into the train winding up the hillside to offer the nuptial sacrifices.

III

A rocky and wooded valley opening on the Rhine. It is part of the region over-ranged by the hunting-party of Hagen's devising. The horns of the hunters are heard in the distance,—Siegfried's horn-call among them, and Hagen's.

Our old acquaintances, the Rhine-daughters, rise to the surface of the water. They have warning or scent that Siegfried is not far, with the Ring, their stolen gold. They complain in their undulating song of the darkness now in the deep, where of old it was light, when the gold was there to shine for

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

them. Notwithstanding their loss, they are little less full of their fun than before; they splash and frolic in the water and with their voices copy the crystal play of the river. They pray the sun to send their way the hero who shall give them back the gold, after which they will regard without envy the sun's luminous eye! Siegfried's horn is heard. Recognising it as that of the hero who interests them, they dive under to consult together,—concerning the best method, of course, of extracting from him the Ring.

Siegfried comes to the edge of the bank overhanging the river, in search of tracks of his game, mysteriously lost. He is blaming some wood-imp for playing him a trick, when the Rhine-daughters, rising into sight, hail him by name. They adopt with him the playful, teasing tone of pretty girls with a likely-looking young fellow: "What are you grumbling into the ground? . . . What imp excites your ire? . . . Has a water-sprite bothered you? . . . Tell us, Siegfried, tell us!" He watches them, smiling, and replies in their own vein: "Have you charmed into your dwellings the shaggy fellow who disappeared from my sight? If he is your sweetheart, far be it from me, you merry ladies, to deprive you of him!" They laugh loud and long, the Rhine-nymphs. "What will you give us, Siegfried, if we find your game for you?" "I have so far no fruit of my chase. You must tell me what you would like!" "A golden ring gleams on your finger . . ." suggests Wellgunde, and, unable to restrain their eagerness, the three cry out in a voice: "Give us that!" He considers the Ring a moment. "A gigantic dragon I slew for the ring, and I am to part with it in exchange for the paws of a worthless bear?" "Are you so niggardly? . . . So higgling at a bargain? . . . You should be generous to ladies! . . ." they shame him one after the other. With perfect good humour, he offers as a better

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

objection: "Were I to waste my property on you, my wife, I suspect, would find fault." "She is a shrew, no doubt? . . . I dare say she beats you. . . . The hero has a presentiment of the weight of her hand! . . ." They laugh immoderately. "Laugh away!" the hero laughs with them, but, not to be compelled by their derision: "I shall none the less leave you to disappointment, for the ring which you covet no teasing shall get for you!" The wily maidens do not take this up, but, turning from him, permit him to overhear the remarks about him which they exchange among themselves: "So handsome! So strong! . . . So fitted to inspire love! . . . What a pity that he is a miser!" With shouts of laughter they duck under.

Siegfried turns away, untroubled, and descends further into the narrow valley. But their words have not quite glanced off him. "Why do I suffer such a mean report of myself? Shall I lend myself to gibes of the sort? If they should come again to the water's edge, the ring they might have!" Too large to feel demeaned by an inconsistency, he shouts to them: "Hey, you lively water-beauties! Come quickly! I make you a gift of the ring!" Taking it off, he holds it toward them. This is the point in his fortunes where we perceive the working of Siegfried's fate. If the nymphs, as one would have felt safe in counting upon their doing, had risen and caught the Ring from him with a laugh louder than any before, all might have been well. Hagen would have had nothing to gain by killing him. But the curse which doomed the owner of the Ring to a bloody end would not have it so. It had been crippled, it is true, against the noble one; it had failed to make him suspicious, sad, and careful. But his violent death we see provided for when, by what seems the merest hazard, his offer of the Ring to the Rhine-maidens is not accepted on the expected

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

terms. The sisters rise to his call, but instead of faces dancing with laughter they show him grave and warning countenances. Their subaqueous deliberations have resulted in a most ill-inspired change of tactics. Instead of snatching at the proffered Ring and glad to have it, they represent to Siegfried that he will be under an obligation to them for ridding him of it. His mood of giving is changed by a threat into one of refusal. "Keep it, hero, and guard it with care, until you become aware of the evil fate you are cherishing under its shape. Then you will be glad if we will deliver you from the curse!" He slips back the Ring on his finger and bids them tell what they know. "Siegfried! We know of evil threatening you! To your danger you retain the Ring! Out of the Rhine-gold it was forged; he who shaped it and miserably lost it, placed a curse upon it long ago, that it should bring death upon him who wore it. As you slew the dragon, even so shall you be slain, and this very day, of this we warn you, unless you give us the Ring to bury in the deep Rhine; its water alone can allay the curse!" "You artful ladies," the hero shakes his head, "let be that policy! If I hardly trusted your flatteries, your attempt to alarm me deceives me still less. . . ." When more impressively still they reiterate their warning, protesting their truth, urging the irresistible strength of the curse woven by the Norns into the coil of the eternal law, he answers, and the nature against which the curse had so long been of no effect shows brightly forth in the brief tirade: "My sword once cleft asunder a spear. The eternal coil of the law, whatever wild curses they have woven into it, the Norns shall see cut through by Nothing. A dragon once upon a time did of a truth warn me of the curse, but he could not teach me to fear! Though the whole world might be gained to me by a ring, for love I would willingly cede it; you should have it if you gave me delight. But if you threaten me

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

in life and limb, though the ring should not enclose the worth of a finger, not by any force could you get it from me! For life and limb, if I must live loveless and a slave to fear,—life and limb, look you, like this I cast them far away from me!” He takes up and flings a clod of earth over his shoulder. The Rhine-daughters in agitation press him still for a moment with warnings; but, realising the futility of these, with the prophecy: “A proud woman will this very day inherit of you; she will lend a more heedful ear to our warning!” they finally swim away, as they announce: “To her! To her! To her!”

Their singing floats back, dying away, a long time after they have taken their leave; Siegfried stands watching them out of sight, amused: “In water as on land I have now learned the ways of women; if a man resist their cajoling, they try threats with him; if he boldly brave these, let him look for scorn and reproaches! And yet—were it not for my truth to Gutrune, one of those dainty water-women I should have liked to tame!”

The horns of the hunting-party are heard approaching. Siegfried shouts in answer to their shouts. When Hagen and Gunther come in sight, he calls to them to join him down there where it is fresh and cool. The company with their freight of game descend into the shady gorge, to camp for an hour. The wine-skins and drink-horns are passed. Siegfried, questioned by Hagen of his fortune at the chase, jestingly gives his account: “I came forth for forest-hunting, but water-game was all that presented itself. Had I had a mind to it, three wild water-birds I might have caught for you, who sang to me, there on the Rhine, that I should be slain to-day!” Never had he spoken with a more unclouded brow. Gunther starts at his words and glances apprehensively at Hagen. Siegfried stretches out contentedly between them, the ample sunshine in his

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

blood, and remembers that he is thirsty. Hagen treats the evil prophecy as lightly as does Siegfried himself. In not unnatural sequence to Siegfried's reference to the water-birds, he remarks: "I have heard it reported, Siegfried, that you understand the language of the birds. Is it true?" "I have not heeded their babble this many a day—" Siegfried is saying, when Gunther's heavy and preoccupied mien is borne upon him; he breaks off to reach him his drink-horn, cheerily rallying him: "Drink, Gunther, drink! Your brother brings it to you!" Gunther, oppressed by his dark doubt of Siegfried, is not prompt in accepting the proffered cup. His reply obscurely conveys his sense of some failure in their good-fellowship. Siegfried takes it up merely to turn into occasion for one of his cordial laughs. "You over-cheerful hero!" sighs Gunther. Something is wrong, Siegfried cannot fail to see. He drops privately to Hagen his interpretation of the friend's gloom: "Brünnhilde is giving him trouble?" "If he understood her as well as you understand the song of the birds!" Siegfried has an inspiration. Those last words of Hagen's contain the germ of it. "Hei! Gunther!" he calls to the blood-brother, who appears so sorely in need of cheering: "You melancholy fellow! If you will thank me for it, I will sing you tales from the days of my youth!"

Gunther's reply is politely encouraging. Hagen joins his invitation to the half-brother's. The listeners place themselves at ease on the ground about the narrator, seated in their midst on a mossy stump. Then Siegfried, with his beautiful, bottomless zest in life, recounts in vivid running sketches the story we know. One after the other the familiar motifs pass in review. From them alone one could reconstruct the tale. Of his childhood in Mime's cave, the forging of Nothung, the slaying of the dragon. Of the wonder worked by the drop of dragon's

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

blood on the tongue, the little bird's good counsel by which he won Tarnhelm and Ring, the same bird's warning upon which he slew Mime. At this point, when we are wondering how, with Brünnhilde wiped from his memory, he can proceed, Hagen hands him a horn filled with wine, in which he has been seen expressing the juice of an herb; this, the Nibelung's son, wise in the virtues of simples, tells him, will sharpen his memory and bring close remote events.

Siegfried takes the cup, but for a moment does not taste it, absorbed, as is evident, in the effort to remember what came right after the point in his story at which he just broke off. The forgetfulness-motif suggests his baffled groping. Mechanically he sets the horn to his lips—a strain of the tenderest and most ecstatic of the Siegfried-Brünnhilde love-music marks the first effect of the draught which dissolves the mists obscuring memory,—followed close by the whole slowly unwinding Brünnhilde-motif. We feel as if we had suddenly, with Siegfried, waked from a bad dream. We take a trembling breath of relief at the weight removed from our heart.

A light of fixed joy grows and grows in Siegfried's face, as upon this recovering of his true identity he takes up his story again: "Wistfully I listened for the bird in the tree-tops. He sat there still, and sang; 'Hei, Siegfried has slain the wicked dwarf! I have in mind for him now the most glorious mate! On a high rock she sleeps, a wall of flame surrounds her abode. If he should push through the fire, if he should waken the bride, then were Brünnhilde his own!'" Gunther hears in growing amazement. "Straightway, unhesitating, I hastened forth. I reached the fire-girt rock. I crossed the flaming barrier, and found in reward"—the memory holds his breath suspended—"a beautiful woman, asleep in a suit of gleaming armour. I loosed the helmet from the glorious head; audaciously with a

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

kiss I waked the maid. . . . Oh, with what ardour did then the arm of the lovely Brünnhilde enfold me!"

Gunther springs up in horrified comprehension. Two ravens at this moment make sudden interruption, flying out of a tree and wheeling above Siegfried's head. He starts up, in natural interest at the apparition of Wotan's messengers. "Can you understand, too, the croaking of these ravens?" sneers Hagen. Siegfried, looking after the black birds as they bend their flight Rhine-wards, turns his back to the questioner. "They bid me take vengeance!" Hagen grimly interprets for himself, and with a quick thrust drives his spear through Siegfried's body, from the back. Too late Gunther holds his arm and the retainers spring to prevent him. Siegfried's eyes flash wildly about for a weapon. He snatches up his great shield and lifts it aloft to crush the perfidious enemy,—but his strength fails, the shield drops, and he falls crashing backwards upon it.

"Hagen, what have you done?" comes accusingly from Gunther and the men-of-arms, while a shudder runs through the assembly, and, as one feels at the music's intimation, through the very heart of nature. "Taken vengeance of perjury!" Hagen coldly replies, and, turning from the group gathered around the dying hero, slowly disappears in the gathering dusk. Gunther, seized with remorseful anguish, bends over the wounded brother. Two of the company, aiding his effort to rise, support him. It is clear at once that immediate surroundings and recent events are blotted from his ken by the brighter light of a remembered scene, filling the wide-open, over-brilliant Wälsung-eyes. The music lets us into the secret first of what it is—so absorbingly present to him in this last hour: the moment marvellous among all in his existence, when he had seen the sleeping Brünnhilde return to life. It is as if it were all

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

happening a second time, she having mysteriously since that first awakening been again sunk into sleep, from which he must now again recall her: "Brünnhilde, sacred bride . . . awake! . . . Open your eyes. . . . Who sealed you again in sleep? . . . Who bound you in joyless slumber? The Awakener is come. He kisses you awake. . . . He rends the confining bands . . . whereupon breaks forth upon him the light of Brünnhilde's smile! . . . Oh, that eye, henceforth to close no more! . . . Oh, the happy heaving of that breath! . . . Sweetest languor, blissful darkness. . . . Brünnhilde welcomes me to her! . . ."

So he dies as he had lived, joyous and unafraid, the curse, while having its way with him to the extent of securing his destruction, crippled as ever before, when the death by which it would punish is embraced like a bride.

For a long moment all stand motionless and heavily silent. It really seems impossible that a spear-thrust could extinguish that glowing,—that superabundant,—that splendid life. Night deepens. At a sign from Gunther, the men lift the dead, laid upon his shield, to their shoulders, and in solemn procession start upon the rocky path homeward.

What is called Siegfried's funeral-march is, as it were, a funeral oration spoken over him by a great voice, of one penetrated with the sense of what he was and of earth's loss in him. "Listen! Listen and shudder, all created things, and feel the shock, and measure the magnitude, of your loss! Behold, he was brave among all heroes, this Walsung,—yet tender, too. He was the child of the love of two beautiful, unhappy beings, and, a glory to them, he became—Siegfried, the most exalted hero of the world! Mourn for him heroically, not with tears, but battle-shouts, in keeping with his greatness!"

The moon breaks through the clouds and showers spectral light upon the funeral train slowly moving up the hillside.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

Night-mists rise from the Rhine and gradually blot out the scene.

When the mists disperse we find ourselves once more in the Hall of the Gibichungen, where Gutrune, troubled by the tardiness of the hunters in returning, strains her hearing for Siegfried's horn. Bad dreams have disturbed her sleep, and the wild neighing of Grane, and the sound of Brünnhilde laughing in the solitary night. "I fear Brünnhilde!" she confesses to herself. Yet, in need of companionship in her anxiety, she calls at the sister-in-law's door; receiving no answer, she looks in. The room is empty. It must have been Brünnhilde, then, whom she saw striding down to the bank of the Rhine, unable, like herself, to sleep.

Hearing a stir, she again listens intently for Siegfried's horn. Not that, but Hagen's lugubrious Hoiho! comes to her ear: "Hoiho! Awake! Lights! Bright torches! We bring home spoils of the chase!" He appears in advance of the party thus announced. "Up, Gutrune! Welcome Siegfried, the strong hero returning home!" She is frightened—the fact is to her so significant of not having heard his horn. As the confused train accompanying the slain hero pours into the hall, Hagen's exultation can no longer contain itself, and, negligent of all suitable appearance of concern for Gutrune's sorrow, he announces the death of her beloved with all the gloating glee he feels: "The pallid hero, no more shall he blow the horn, no more storm forth either to chase or to battle, nor sue ever more for fair women!" They bring in the body, they set down the bier. "The victim of a wild boar, Siegfried, your dead lord!" With a shriek Gutrune falls fainting upon the inanimate form. Gunther tries to comfort her, clearing himself, accusing Hagen: "He is the accursed boar who slew the noble one!" "Yes, I killed him!" boldly boasts Hagen, so near the attainment of

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

his object that he is careless of all else; "I, Hagen, struck him dead! He was reserved for my spear, by which he swore his false oath. I have earned the sacred right to his spoils, wherefore—I demand that Ring!" "Back!" shouts Gunther, as Hagen approaches to take it. "What belongs to me, you shall never touch! Dare you lay hands on Gutrune's inheritance?" But Hagen, in his new mood, is quick of his hands as earlier of his wits. He draws his sword and without further parley attacks Gunther. The fight is short, Gunther falls. He had been the claimant of the Ring but a few hours. Hagen hurries to the bier to snatch his prey from Siegfried's finger. The dead hand is slowly raised . . . and threateningly warns off the robber. Hagen drops back.

In the stillness of horror which succeeds the loud outcry of the women at the portent, a solemn figure parts the crowd and strides slowly forward—Brünnhilde, to whom the passing hours have restored calm, and to whom meditation has brought light.

She knows now what she should think, and what there remains to do.

Gutrune, hearing her voice, raises her own to accuse her of all this woe overtaking them: "You—you incited the men against him—woe that you should ever have entered this house!" "Hush! pitiable girl!" Brünnhilde checks her, without anger. "You never were his wedded wife; as his paramour you ensnared his affections. The mate of his manhood am I, to whom he vowed eternal vows, before ever he saw you!" Gutrune upon this, apprehending all, curses Hagen who had given her the evil drink through which Siegfried had been made to forget his former love.

A long space Brünnhilde stands in contemplation of Siegfried's face, gazing with changing emotions, from passionate

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

sorrow to solemn exultation. She turns at length to the vassals and commands them to build a great funeral pile. High and bright let the flames leap which shall devour the noble body. Let them bring Grane, that he with herself may follow the hero, whose honours her own body yearns to share. While they are fulfilling her wish, she falls once more into rapt study of the dead face, her own face becoming gentler and gentler, as clearer and clearer understanding comes to her of him and all that had happened. Her features appear softly glorified at last with the light of forgiveness and reconciliation—and she speaks his praise and justification: “Clear as the sun his light shines upon me. He was the truest of all, this one who betrayed me!” As an instance of his truth she quotes the incident of the sword, placed, in loyalty to his friend, between himself and his own beloved, “alone dear to him.” “Vows more true than his were never vowed by any; no one more faithfully than he observed a covenant; no other ever loved with a love so unalloyed; and yet all vows, all covenants, all obligations of love, were betrayed by him as never by man before! Do you know how this came to be? . . .” The dealing with her of Wotan she recognises in these extreme calamities falling upon her; she must suffer all this to be brought, blind one, to a comprehension of that which was demanded of her, which she had so haughtily refused to consider when Waltraute pleaded for the gods. She bows now under his heavy hand, but not without reproach and arraignment: “Oh you, holy guardians of vows! Turn your eyes upon my broad-blown woe: behold your eternal guilt! Hear my accusation, most high god! Through his bravest action, desired by you and of use to you, you devoted him who performed it to dark powers of destruction. . . .” (The old story of the Ring!) “By the truest of all men born must I be betrayed, that a woman might grow wise! . . . And

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

have I understood at last what it is you want of me? . . . Aye, of everything, of everything, everything, I have understanding! All has in this hour become clear to me. . . . I hear the rustling, too, of your ravens: with the message so fearfully yearned for I send them both home. . . . Be at rest, be at rest, you god!" The tone of these last words is that of the old Brünnhilde once more, the tender daughter pitying her father's sorrows. Yes, let him be at rest, for the Ring shall go back to the Rhine, to obtain which result her dearest happiness has been sacrificed. She takes it from Siegfried's finger, and places it—Siegfried's love-token, not to be yielded up while she lives—upon her own. The Rhine-daughters, when the funeral pile has burned to the ground, shall take it from her ashes. She has had conversation in the night with the wise sisters of the deep; no fear but that they will be at hand.

And is that what will be Brünnhilde's prophesied world-delivering act? Restoring the Ring to the Rhine, thus saving the world definitely from Alberich and the army of the night? Or can we suppose it to be the act which she accomplishes in the same stroke,—the act of plunging into their twilight the whole tribe of the tired unjust gods, so long now tremulously awaiting their end? Or, is the latter act Brünnhilde's supreme vengeance? Or,—this seems more likely,—an act of supreme benevolence, the result of at last understanding "everything, everything, everything!"?

The funeral pile decked with precious covers and flowers stands ready, Siegfried's body upon it. Brünnhilde seizes a torch from one of the attendants: "Fly home, you ravens, report to your master what you have heard here by the shore of the Rhine! Pass, on your way, near to Brünnhilde's rock: direct Loge, who is still smouldering there, to Walhalla. For the dawn is now breaking of the end of the gods! Thus do I hurl

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

a burning brand into Walhalla's flaunting citadel!" She sets fire with these words to the pyre, which rapidly blazes up. Wotan's ravens are seen slowly flapping off toward the horizon. Brünnhilde takes Grane from the young men holding him, and, with all the joy now again in her voice, face, and words, which illuminated the moment of her first union, long ago, with the then so youthful and ingenuous Awakener, she rushes to be reunited to him in death, springing with her jubilant Valkyrie-cry upon Grane and with him plunging into the flames.

The fire flares doubly brilliant and high; the red glare of it fills the whole scene. It becomes evident suddenly that the Hall of the Gibichungen is burning. The people huddle together in terror. When the funeral pile sinks to a heap, the Rhine is seen flooding in upon the embers. Hagen, eagerly on the watch for his last chance, beholds with the insanity of despair the Rhine-daughters rise from the waves close beside the site of the pyre. Hurling from him shield and spear, he dashes into the water to thrust them back. "Away from the Ring!" Two of the jocose sisters for all reply entwine their arms around his neck and draw him away and away with them into the deep water. The third triumphantly holds up before his eyes the recovered Ring.

As the fire dies among the blackened ruins of the Hall, and the Rhine recedes into its boundaries, a red light breaks in the sky. More and more brightly it glows, till Walhalla is discerned in its central illumination, with its enthroned gods and heroes. Flames are seen invading the stately hall. When the company of the Blessed are completely wrapped in fire, the curtain falls.

The last word of the music is the exultant phrase by which Sieglinde greeted the prophecy of Siegfried's birth. It has been woven all through Brünnhilde's last ardently happy salu-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

tation to him, as if in recognition of some mystical quality—in death—of birth.

So Wotan finds his rest, and the ill consequences at last end of his unjust act—end with the reparation of the injustice, the return of the gold to the Rhine. But has not the evil act been like the Djinn of old, let out of the insignificant-looking urn, waxing great, looming dark, and dictating hard terms! When Wotan in pride of being committed it, against two simpletons, how could he have divined that by this pin-point he set inexorable machinery moving which should bring about his confusion, forcing him in its progress to so many injustices more, injustices which his soul would loathe, which would blight his best beloved, which would by far be his greatest punishment! . . . The Trilogy is moral as a tract.

THE MASTER-SINGERS OF
NUREMBERG

THE MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

I

THE "argument of The Master-singers" is effectually given in the Overture: Art and Love. The Masters are first—a little pompously, as befits their pretensions,—presented to us. Then Young Love sweeps across the scene, delicate musical gale. The themes of the two then mingle, foreshadowing how the affairs of Walther shall become entangled with those of the Guild.

This Walther von Stolzing, a young Franconian noble, last of his line, had for reasons which are not given forsaken the ancestral castle and come to Nuremberg in the intention of becoming a citizen there. He had brought letters to a prominent burgher of the town, Veit Pogner, the rich goldsmith, long acquainted with his family, and known to it, by reputation. Pogner had offered him every courtesy, hospitality, and assistance in the business of selling his Franconian lands.

Walther had found twenty-four hours in Nuremberg and Pogner's house ample time to fall deeply, transcendingly, rapturously, in love with the goldsmith's daughter. She is very young, very feminine, even in the respect of being little rather than large, so that she is always called, fondly, Evchen, little Eva. Her name is perhaps meant to indicate her quality of inveterate femineity. The whole story goes to show that she

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

was pretty enough to turn heads young and old. She had been an obedient, an exemplary daughter, up to the hour of meeting Walther, allowing her father to think for her, accepting demurely his views for her. How should she not feel it best, so long as her immature heart had never spoken a word, to let a most kind and indulgent parent, whose wisdom it was not for her to question, dispose of her hand in the manner he thought most fitting? When she had seen Walther, however, a new light illumined her position.

On the second day of his acquaintance with her, it seemed to the young lord that he could not live through another night but he made sure of one point. He followed his lady to vespers, in the hope of an opportunity to exchange one private word, ask one question. It was the eve of Saint John's day. The congregation when the curtain rises is concluding an anthem to the "noble Baptist." Eva and Magdalene, her nurse, are in one of the pews that fill the nave of the church. Walther stands in the aisle, leaning against a pillar, from which position he can watch the fair one. He tries whenever her eyes stray his way, as, irresistibly attracted, they frequently do, to convey to her by glance and gesture his prayer for a moment's interview. Magdalene feels herself repeatedly obliged to recall her young lady's attention to the church-service. The congregation rises at last and flocks to the church-door. Walther steps before the two women as they are passing forth with the rest, with the hurried demand to Eva for a word, a single word. Magdalene, who is a step behind, has not caught his request. Eva with quick resource sends her back to the pew for her forgotten kerchief. But Walther has become alarmed at his own boldness, and instead of utilising his opportunity to utter or obtain that "single word," falls to pouring forth many disconnected words by way of leading up to the all-important question.

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

He has not contrived to get it out before Magdalene returns. But Eva then discovers that her brooch too has been left in the pew. Walther, because he really dreads to hear an answer which may dash his dearest hopes, makes no better use of this second chance than of the first; he is still leading up to his famous question when Magdalene brings the brooch. But upon this fortune favours him, Magdalene must run back to the pew for her forgotten prayer-book; and in the brief interval of her search Walther asks breathlessly of Eva: if she be already betrothed! She does not reply by the instantaneous negative he had hoped for, and the passionate wish breaks from his lips that he had never crossed the threshold of her father's house! Magdalene, who has rejoined them, bridles indignant-ly at such an expression from him. "How now, my lord, what is this you say? Scarce arrived in Nuremberg, were you not hospitably received? Is not the best afforded by kitchen and cellar, cupboard and store-room, deserving of any gratitude whatever?" Eva tries to silence her: "That is not what he meant, good Lene. But . . . this information he desires of me—How am I to say it? I hardly myself understand! I feel as if I were dreaming—He wishes to know whether I am already betrothed?" Lene at this recognises, of course, that here is that reprobate thing, a lover, and remembers her first duty as a duenna, to keep off all such from her young charge. She is for hurrying home at once. Walther resolutely detains her. "Not till I know all!"—"The church is empty, every one is gone!" Eva gives as a reason for not being so punctilious. Lene sees in the very loneliness of the place a reason the more for departing with all speed,—but Fate again helps Walther. David, a youthful shoe-maker's apprentice, enters the church from the vestry, and falls to making mysterious preparations, drawing curtains which shut off the nave of the church, meas-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

uring distances on the pavement with a yard-rule. No sooner has Magdalene caught sight of him than she becomes absent-minded, and when Eva urges, "What am I to tell him? Do you tell me what I am to say!" more good-humoured than before, she vouchsafes: "Your lordship, the question you ask of the damsel is not so easy to answer. As a matter of truth, Evchen Pogner is betrothed——" "But no one," quickly adds the girl, "has as yet see the bridegroom!" He gathers from the two that the bridegroom shall be the victor on the following day in a song-contest, the master-singer to whom the other master-singers award the prize, and whom the bride herself crowns. It all falls strangely on the ears of one not a Nuremberger. "The master-singer? . . ." he falters. "Are you not one?" Eva asks incredulously, wistfully. And when in his effort to grasp the situation exactly he continues asking questions, she answers his interrogative: "The bride then chooses? . . ." with complete forgetfulness of every maidenly convention, by an ardent, honest "You, or no one!"—"Are you gone mad?" Magdalene grasps her arm, shocked and flustered. She has, and feels no shame. "Good Lene, help me to win him!"—"But you saw him yesterday for the first time!" No, she became a victim so readily to love's torment, Eva tells Lene, because she had long known him in a picture, Albrecht Dürer's painting of David, after the slaying of Goliath, his sword at his belt, his sling in his hand, his head brightly encircled with fair curls.

Joyful agitation has seized the Knight at Eva's sweet impulsive word, and, with it, bewilderment as to what must be his course in circumstances so unprecedented. He restlessly paces the pavement, trying to determine how he shall deal with the strange conditions raising their barrier between him and the object of his desire. Magdalene calls to her the object of hers.

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

The middle-aged spinster has a weak spot in her heart for David. The boyish shoe-maker's apprentice on his side adores her—and the pleasant bits she maternally smuggles to him from Pogner's kitchen. Questioned, he informs her that he is making the place ready for the master-singers. There is to be directly a song-trial: such song-apprentices as commit no offence against the table of rules are to be promoted to master-ship. Here would be the Knight's chance, reflects Lene,—his one chance to be made master before the fateful morrow. When, as they are leaving, Walther offers the ladies his company to Master Pogner's, she bids him wait rather for Pogner where he stands: if he wishes to enter the contest for Evchen's hand, Fortune has favoured him with respect to time and place. "What am I to do?" asks the lover eagerly. David shall instruct him, and Magdalene herself instructs David to make himself useful to the Knight. "Something choice from the kitchen I will save for you. And if the young lord here shall to-day be made a master, you may to-morrow proffer your requests full boldly!"

"Shall I see you again?" Eva shyly asks of Walther, as Magdalene is hurrying her off. His answer gives the keynote of him, characteristic outburst that it is of his vital, vigorous, enthusiastic youth, to which all things seem possible—beautiful youth, which has the splendour and force of fire, with the freshness of flowers; which flashes like a sword and trembles like a lute-string. "Shall I see you again?" It is after vespers. "This evening, surely!" he replies: "How shall I tell you what I would be willing to undertake for your sake? New is my heart, new is my mind, new to me is all this which I am entering upon. One thing only I know, one thing only I grasp, that I will devote soul and senses to winning you! If it may not be with the sword, I must achieve it with song, and as a master sing you mine!

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

For you, my blood and my possessions, for you, the sacred aspiration of a poet!" Strains from this sweet and proud profession are scattered all through the story, they are the Walther-motifs, heard in his first sigh as he watches her from the shadow of the church-pillar, and woven finally into his prize-song. And the effect of youth that goes magically with them! The fragrance that belongs to them, with the fire! As of green things in early May, wet with the dew of dawn,—the beams of the rising sun kindling all to a softly-dazzling glory. The hearer feels himself young too with an immortal youth. . . . But words are never so ineffectual as when they would translate music.

When Walther and Eva part, they are candidly lovers, for she has joined her voice to his at the closing words of his profession, and herself warmly professed: "My heart with its blessed ardour,—for you, its love-consecrated kindness!" In a moment the women are gone. Walther casts himself in a great high-backed carved seat which apprentices have a moment before placed in the conspicuous position it occupies, and is absorbed in the attempt to collect himself, deal with his swarming emotions, order his wild thoughts, scheme what to do. The excited blood in his veins sings the song of his youth.

Apprentices in number, lively and mischievous imps, have entered and are setting the place aright for the meeting of the master-singers, placing seats for these on one side and forms for themselves on the opposite side, arranging near the centre a platform and blackboard enclosed by curtains. David stands studying that original who supposes one can be made a master in an hour. The gentleman's rank and fine feathers do not impress the youth, who feels himself rather, with respect to the requirements of the hour, in a position to patronise. Walther is startled to hear him suddenly shout: "Begin!"

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

"What is the matter?" he inquires, waking out of his dream. "Begin! That is what the Marker calls out, and then you must sing. Don't you know that?"—"Who is the Marker?"—"Don't you know? Have you never been to a song-trial?"—"Never, where the judges were artisans."—"Are you a poet?"—"Would that I were!"—"Are you a singer?"—"Would that I knew!"—"But you have at least been a 'school-frequenter' and a 'pupil?'"—"It all sounds foreign to my ear!"—"And you wish to become a master, off-hand, like that?"—"What enormous difficulty does the matter present?"—David groans: "Oh, Lene, Lene . . . oh, Magdalene!"—"What a to-do you make! Come, tell me, in good faith, what I must do!" David has now the chance he loves. Here is one who knows nothing whatever of the things it is his pride to have learned at least the names of, the things to a Nuremberger worth knowing among all. The ignoramus shall be properly dazzled. David strikes an attitude. "Myself," he informs Walther, "I am learning the Art from the greatest master in Nuremberg, Hans Sachs. For a full year I have received his instructions. Shoe-making and poetry I learn simultaneously. When I have pounded the leather even and smooth, I learn of vowel-sounds and of consonance. When I have waxed the thread hard and stiff, I apply myself to the rules of rhyme. While punching holes and driving the awl, I commit the science of rhythm and number. . . ." And so forth. For a full year he has been learning, and how far does Walther suppose he has got? The Knight suggests, laughing: "To the making of a right good pair of shoes!" Nay, this top-lofty aristocrat, with his jokes, does not in the least understand! And David enlarges further on the great and various difficulties in the way of him who aspires to become a master-singer. A "bar," let him know, has manifold parts and divisions, full difficult to master the law

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

thereof! . . . And then comes the "after-song," which must not be too short, nor yet too long, and must contain no rhyme already used in the foregoing stanzas. But even when a person has learned and knows all this, even then he is not yet called a master. For there are a thousand subtleties and refinements the aspirant must still make his own. Whether David in showing off draws a bit upon his fancy, or whether the master-singers really cherished these distinctions in mode and tone, one can but wonder. Suggestive the titles of them certainly are. Glibly, grandly, and with a rich relish, David tells them off: The fool's-cap, the black-ink mode; the red, blue and green tones; the hawthorn-blossom, straw-wisp, fennel modes; the tender, the sweet, the rose-coloured tone; the short-lived love, the deserted-lover tones; the rosemary, the golden lupine, the rainbow, the nightingale modes; the English tin, the stick-cinnamon modes; the fresh orange, green linden-blossom modes; the frogs', the calves', the goldfinch modes; the mode—save the mark!—of the secret gormandiser; the lark, the snail tones; the barking tone; the balsam, the marjoram modes; the tawny lion-fell, the faithful pelican modes; the resplendent gold-galloon mode! Walther cries out to Heaven for help. "Those," proceeds David, "are only the names! Now learn to sing them exactly as the masters have established, every word and tone sounding clearly, the voice rising and falling as it should. . . ." etc., etc., etc.; "but if, when you have done all these things correctly, you should make a mistake, or in any wise stumble and flounder, whatever your success up to that moment, you would have failed in the song-trial! In spite of great diligence and application, myself I have not brought it to that point. Let me be an example to you, and drop this folly of seeking to be made a master!"

Walther, persisting in inquiry, conquers the information at

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

last that in order to be named a master a man must compose an original poem and fit it to an original air, in accordance with the many laws laid down by his judges. "All there is for me to do then," concludes the lover, nothing discouraged, "is to aim directly at mastership. If I am to sing successfully, I must find, to verses of my own, a melody of my own!" David, who has joined the apprentices, fends off their teasing by privately preparing them for rich diversion presently at the song-trial. "Not I to-day, another fellow is up for trial! He has not been a 'pupil' and is not a 'singer'; the formality of earning the title of 'poet' he says he will omit; for he is a gentleman of quality, and expects, with one leap and no further difficulty, this very day to become a master. Wherefore arrange carefully the Marker's cabinet; the blackboard on the wall, convenient to the Marker's hand. . . . The Marker, yes!" he repeats bodingly to the not sufficiently impressed knight. "Are you not afraid? Many a candidate already, singing before him, has met with failure. He allows you seven errors; he marks them there with chalk; whoever makes more than seven errors has completely and conclusively failed!" The apprentices in their glee over the prospective entertainment join hands and dance in a ring around the curtained recess where the Marker shortly shall be chronicling the slips and blunders of this self-confident lordling.

Their play is interrupted, and they hurriedly put on good behaviour, at the entrance of two of the masters, Pogner and Sixtus Beckmesser, the town-clerk. The change in the music is definite as a change of air and scene, is like passing from the hubbub of the street into some calm and pleasant precinct. Beckmesser is importuning Pogner with regard to his intentions for the morrow. Beckmesser wishes extremely to become his son-in-law, wherefore he thinks it would be best to give the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

young lady no choice, to decree simply and finally that the winner of the prize for song should be her husband. He feels cocksure of his superiority as a master-singer, but dubious, it would seem, of his power to enthrall the fancy of a young girl. "If Evchen's voice can strike out the candidate, of what use to me is my supremacy as a master?"—"Come," replies Pogner sensibly, "if you have no hopes of the daughter's regard, how do you come to enter the lists as her suitor?" Beckmesser, after this check, cannot, of course, urge anything further in the same direction. He begs for Pogner's influence with his child, and turns away disgusted with the goldsmith's merely civil assent. It seems to him that a man like Pogner ought to know as well as he knows that women have no real taste, that they are capable of preferring the sorriest stuff to all the poetry in the world. How shall he, Beckmesser, avoid a disappointment, a public defeat? He decides upon reflection to try the prize-song he has prepared, as a serenade, and make sure beforehand that the maiden will be pleased with it.

Walther has approached and exchanged greetings with Pogner. He comes directly to the point, and, with airy aplomb, "If truth must be told," he says, "the thing which drove me from home and brought me to Nuremberg was the love of Art, nothing else! I forgot to tell you this yesterday—but to-day I proclaim it aloud. It is my desire to become a master-singer. Receive me, master, in the guild!"

The masters are flocking in, bakers, tailors, coppersmiths, grocers, weavers. Pogner turns to them, delighted. "Hear, what a very interesting case. The knight here, my friend, is desirous of dedicating himself to our Art. It seems like the olden days come back!—You can hardly think," to Walther, "how glad I am! As willingly indeed as ever I lent you my assistance to sell your land, I will receive you in the guild!"—"What man

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

is that?" Beckmesser almost barks, catching sight of Walther. Suspiciously he observes him: "I do not like him. . . . What is he doing here? How his eyes beam with laughter! . . . Look sharp, Sixtus, keep an eye on that fellow!"

"And may I hope," asks Walther of Pogner, "to have this very day an opportunity to undergo trial and be elected master?"—"Oho!" soliloquises Beckmesser, with a shock of surprise at audacity such as this, "on that head stands no skittle!" There is no moss growing on him! Pogner is no doubt surprised too, but answers kindly: "The matter must be conducted according to rule. To-day, however, as it happens, is song-trial. I will propose you. The masters lend a favourable ear to requests of mine."

The masters are assembled; last of all has entered Hans Sachs, the shoe-maker,—dear, benignantly-gazing Hans Sachs. "Are we all here?" asks one of the members. "Sachs is here! What more is necessary?" sneers Beckmesser.

Fritz Kothner, the baker, in the capacity of speaker, calls the roll. As the meeting is about to pass to the business of the day, Pogner asks for the floor, and unfolds before the assembled guild his romantic scheme: The following is Saint John's day, when it is customary for the master-singers to hold a song-contest out in the open, among the people, the victorious singer receiving a prize. "Now I, by God's grace, am a rich man, and every one should give according to his means. I cast about therefore for a gift to give not unworthy of me. Hear what I determined upon. In my extensive travels over Germany, I have often been chagrined to find that the burgher is held cheap, is thought close-fisted and mean-minded. Among high and low alike, I heard the bitter reproach, till I was soul-sick of it,—that the burgher has no aim or object above commerce and the getting of money. That we alone in the whole kingdom

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

of Germany are the guardians and preservers of art, they take into no account. To what point we place our honour in that, with what a lofty spirit we cherish the good and beautiful, how highly we prize art and its influence, I wished therefore to show the world. So hear, Masters, the gift which I have appointed for prize: To the singer who in the song-contest shall before all the people win the prize on Saint John's day, let him be who he may, I give, devotee of art that I am, Veit Pogner of Nuremberg, with my whole inheritance, even as it stands, Eva, my only child, in marriage!"

Loud applause. "There is a man for you! . . . There is talk of the right sort! . . . There one sees what a Nuremberger is capable of! . . . Who would not wish to be a bachelor? . . ." "I dare say that some," suggests Sachs, "would not mind giving away their wives!"

But there is a postscript to Pogner's address which qualifies the aspect of the whole: The maiden shall have the right to reject the masters' choice. That is what has from the first bothered Beckmesser, in Pogner's counsel before this making public of his idea. The general mood is changed by this revelation. "Does it strike you as judicious?" Beckmesser privately consults Kothner; "Dangerous I call it!"—"Do I understand aright," asks Kothner; "that we are placed in the hands of the young lady? If the master-singers' verdict then does not agree with hers, how is it to operate?"—"Let the young lady choose at once according to the inclination of her heart, and leave master-singing out of the game!" remarks Beckmesser tartly. "Not at all! Not at all!" Pogner strives to calm them, "Not in the very least! You have imperfectly understood. The maiden may refuse the one to whom you master-singers award the prize, but she may not choose another. A master-singer he must be. Only one crowned by yourselves may be-

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

come a suitor for her." The arrangement does seem, closely considered, rather hard on the young lady, and one fancies more than once, in the course of the play, a shade of sheepishness in the father's own attitude toward it,—momentary ripples of misgiving.

A voice of beautiful, calm, corrective sanity is now raised in the assembly. "Your pardon!" speaks Sachs to Pogner, "you have perhaps already gone somewhat far. The heart of a young girl and the heart aglow for master-art do not always burn with an identical flame. Feminine judgment, untutored as it is, would seem to me on a level with popular judgment. If therefore you have in mind to show the people how highly you honour art, and if, leaving to your daughter the right of choice, you wish her not to repudiate the verdict, let the people be among the judges, for the people's taste is sure to coincide with the girl's."

Indignation upon this among the masters. "The people? . . . That were fine! As well say good-bye, once for all, to art! . . . Sachs, what you say is nonsense. . . . Are the rules of art to be set aside for the people?"—"Understand me aright!" Sachs meets them; "How you take on! You will own that I know the rules thoroughly. For many a year I have been at pains to keep the guild to a strict observation of them. But once a year it would seem to me wise to test the rules themselves, and see whether in the easy grooves of habit their strength and vitality have not been lost. And whether you are still upon the right track of nature you can only find out from such as know nothing of tabulated rules!" (The apprentices, who here represent the people, and have no great love for the *Tabulatur*, give evidence of joy.) "Wherefore it would seem to me expedient that yearly, at Saint John's feast, instead of permitting the people to come to you, you should descend out of your

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

lofty mastership-cloud, and yourselves go to the people. You wish to please the people. It would strike me as to the point to let the people tell you itself whether you succeed in pleasing it. You would thus secure a vital advantage, both for the people and for art. There you have Hans Sachs's opinion!"

No one agrees with him, of course. "You no doubt mean well, but it would be a mistake. . . . If the people is to have a voice, I, for one, shall keep my mouth shut. . . . If art is to run after the favour of the people, it cannot fail to come to grief and contempt."—"His success would be enormous, no doubt, who urges this matter so stiffly," Beckmesser puts in spitefully; "His compositions are nearly all popular street-songs!"

Pogner sets Sachs's suggestion aside with perfect civility and good humour. "The thing I am about to do is novel already. Too much novelty at one time might bring in its wake regret. . . ."—"Sufficient to me," Sachs yields the point, "is the maiden's right of refusal!"—"That cobbler always excites my wrath!" mutters Beckmesser.

They pass to the order of the day. "Who enters the lists as a candidate? A bachelor he must be."—"Or perhaps a widower?" offers Beckmesser; "Ask Sachs!"—"Oh, no, master Beckmesser," Sachs retorts; "Of younger wax than either you or I must the suitor be, if Evchen is to bestow the prize on him!"—"Younger than I, too? . . . Coarse fellow!"

At the question whether any be on the spot who wish to take the song-trial, Pogner presents Walther von Stolzing, as one desirous of being that same day elected master-singer. The motif of Wather's presentation gives a clear idea of the knight's charming appearance, his grace, his elastic step, his hat and feathers, the delicate haughtiness of his bearing, in keeping with his proud name.

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

A black suspicion enters Beckmesser's breast at sight of him: he is the card which Pogner has all along had up his sleeve. The town-clerk declares promptly that it is too late now to enter the new-comer. The masters exchange glances: "A noble? . . . Is it a case for rejoicing? Or is there danger in it? . . . The fact that Master Pogner speaks for him has its weight, certainly. . . ."—"If he is to be welcomed among us," says Kothner, somewhat forbiddingly, "he must show proper recommendations."—"Do not mistake me," Pogner hastens to say; "Though I wish him good fortune, I have no thought of waiving any rule. Put to him, gentlemen, the customary questions." At the very first question, however, whether he be free and honourably born, Pogner hurriedly prevents Walther's answer by his own, making himself voucher for him in every respect such as that. The generous Sachs, feeling the something grudging in the attitude of the masters, reminds them that it had long been one of the rules made by themselves that an applicant being a lord or a peasant should have no significance, that inquiry concerning art alone should be made of one desiring to become a master-singer. Kothner passes thereupon to the question: "Of what master are you a disciple?" And then is born into the world a new, a ravishing melody—which has all the delight in it that can be compressed into the space. Airily, confidently, debonairly, Walther delivers himself, in the sweet ingenuousness of his heart, "new," as he had said, ignorant as yet of the jealous world's ways: "Beside my quiet hearth in winter-time, when castle and court were buried in snow, in an ancient book, bequeathed to me by my fathers, I was wont to read recorded the engaging beauties of past Springs, as well as, prophesied, the beauties of the Spring soon to reawaken. The poet, Walther von der Vogelweid, he it is who has been my master!" Sachs has listened with a surprised, charmed sympathy. He

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

nods beamingly: "A good master!"—"But long dead!" snaps Beckmesser; "How could he learn the canons from him?"

Kothner proceeds without comment to the next question: "In what school did you learn to sing?"—"Then when the sward was free from frost, and summer-time was come back, all that in the long winter-evenings I had read in the old book was proclaimed aloud in the luxuriance of the forest. I caught the clear sound of it there. In the forest where the birds congregate, I learned likewise to sing!"—"Ho, ho, from finches and tomtits you acquired the art of master-singing?" Beckmesser jeers; "Your song no doubt smacks of its teachers!"—"What do you think, masters," inquires Kothner, upon this hopeless revelation, "shall I proceed with the questions? It strikes me his lordship's answers are altogether wide of the mark."—"That is what will presently be seen," Sachs interposes warmly; "If his art is of the right sort, and he duly proves it, of what consequence is it from whom he learned it?" Whereupon Kothner proceeds, addressing Walther: "Are you prepared, now, at once, to attempt an original master-song, new in conception, original both in text and tune?" Walther answers unhesitatingly: "All that winter-night and forest-splendour, that book and grove have taught me; all that the magic of poetry has secretly revealed to me; all that I have gathered, a thoughtful listener, from ride to battle or from dance in gay assembly,—all this, in the present hour, when the highest prize of life may be purchased by a song, is what must necessarily flow into my song, original in word and note,—is what must be outpoured before you, masters, if I succeed, as a master-song!"

"Did you gather anything from that torrent of words?" Beckmesser asks, with his eyebrows up among his hair, of his fellow-masters. "Now, masters, if you please," Kothner directs, "let the Marker take his seat. Does his lordship," to

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

Walther, "choose a sacred subject?" "One that is sacred to me!" the young man answers magnificently; "The banner of Love I swing and I sing—and cherish good hope!" "That," considers Kothner, without a gleam, "comes under the head of secular subject. And now, Master Beckmesser, pray shut yourself in!" With a thin pose of reluctance, Beckmesser takes his way toward the curtained cabinet. "A sour office—and to-day especially. The chalk, I surmise, will be troublesomely in requisition. Know, Sir Knight, Sixtus Beckmesser is the Marker. Here in the cabinet he attends to his stern duty. He allows you seven errors. He marks them down in there with chalk. If you make over seven errors, Sir Knight, you have failed in the song-trial. Keen is the Marker's ear; that the sight of him therefore may not disconcert you, he relieves you of his presence and considerably shuts himself up in there—God have you in his keeping!" He has climbed upon the platform; he sharply draws the curtains.

Two apprentices take down from the wall and bring forward the *Leges Tabulaturæ*. With pomp and flourish Kothner reads them off to Walther. The "tabulature" gives the straight and narrow laws upon which a song must be constructed, to earn its singer the dignity of mastership. "Now take your seat in the singing-chair!" Kothner orders Walther at the close of his reading. "Here, in this chair?" It is the tall carved chair in which he had cast himself earlier. "As is the custom of the school!" Even so much of restraint as the obligation to sing on a given spot is repugnant to the spirit of the high-born youth, who yet is undertaking to satisfy the most law-ridden assemblage he could have met with. He murmurs, taking the seat: "For your sake, beloved, it shall be done!"—"The singer sits!" announces Kothner. "Begin!" shouts Beckmesser out of sight.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

From Beckmesser's cry "Begin!" Walther takes his cue, and simply vaulting into the seat of his Pegasus, casting the bridle upon the neck of inspiration, he directly before them all pours forth his full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art. He has never committed their canons, is ignorant of their conventions; he has genius, that is all, and its daring; is a poet born, not made; is at the moment, beside all the rest, uplifted by the divine fire of his love—and his song is right as some natural object, a crystal or a flower. Consummate as is the song, it has yet the character perfectly of an improvisation—the ideal improvisation, let us say—the gush, the rush, the profusion of lovely ornament, the unrestraint,—but essentially orderly, the unrestraint, like that of an army with banners, swarming, in only apparent confusion, up a height, to assured victory. The urge, the climbing effect of the song, are owing, it is plain enough, to Walther's being really inside of it, to his having cast his whole self into it, with his straining after a goal, his desperate necessity to win. In this case, verily the style is the man. "Begin!"—runs the sense of that perfect song, "Thus shouted Spring in the woods, till they rang again! And as the sound died away in distant waves, in the distance a sound was born, drawing nearer and nearer in a mighty flood. It grows, it resounds, the woods re-echo with a multitude of sweet voices. Loud and clear, it sweeps anear, to what a torrent it is grown! Like clangour of bells rings the multiple voice of Joy! The forest, how readily it responds to the call which has wakened it anew to life, and entones the sweet canticle of Spring!"

The Marker's chalk is not idle; a number of workmanlike scratches have been heard. Walther has stopped short, jarred by the sound. He resumes after a moment: "In a thorny hedge, devoured by envy and chagrin, Winter, in his armour of ill-will, cowers in hiding. Amid the rustling of withered leaves,

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

he sits spying with watchful eye and ear for a chance to bring to grief the happy singing. . . ." The singer bounds to his feet. "None the less, 'Begin!' The cry rang in my breast, when I was as yet wholly unaware of love! And in my breast I felt a deep stirring, which woke me as if from a dream. My heart filled the chamber of my bosom with its trembling palpitations; mightily surged my blood, its stream swollen by new emotions; stormily out of the warm night pressed the host of sighs,—increasing, in the wild tumult of joy, to the innumerableness of the sea. My breast, with what rapture it responds to the call which has wakened it to new life, and entones the lovely canticle of Love!"

He has hardly ceased, when Beckmesser thrusts apart the curtains. "Have you finished? I have quite finished with the blackboard!" He holds up for inspection the blackboard, overscored on both sides with great chalk-marks. The masters break into laughter. "Have the goodness to listen," demands Walther imperiously; "I have only just reached the point where my song is to publish my lady's praise!"—"Go and sing wherever else you please. Here you have failed." Beckmesser descends from his post, flourishing the blackboard. "I beg you will examine, masters, this blackboard. Never since I live has such a thing been heard of. I should not have believed it though you had all affirmed it under oath. . . ." Walther, in the innocence of his youth, loudly appeals: "Do you intend to allow him, masters, to interrupt me like this? Am I not from any one of you to have a hearing?" Pogner's courtesy interferes: "One word, friend Marker, are you not out of temper?" Beckmesser excitedly proceeds to justify his chalk-marks. No beginning or end, defective metre, defective construction! Blind meaning! Not one proper breathing-space anywhere! No appropriate colouring—and of melody not a vestige! Then,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

what a mad medley of "modes"! A mixture of adventure-tone, blue-knightly-spurs tone, tall-pine-trees tone and haughty-stripling tone! (Which permits the supposition that David, though moved by the desire to amaze, was yet a faithful reporter of the refinements of master-singing.) The master-singers agree readily with Beckmesser, are really relieved to find their impressions boldly put into form for them by him. Not one of them has understood anything. Walther's unprecedented leaping to his feet in the heat of inspiration has given offence to this one; the other terms his singing "empty battering at the ear-drums." They are about to subscribe unanimously to Beckmesser's verdict that he has lost his case, when Sachs's voice breaks in upon the confusion. He has listened to Walther in complete self-forgetful absorption. The absence of all jealousy in his large nature leaves his mind peculiarly open for genuine first-hand impressions; his wide understanding is not repelled by the new and strange. The close of the young man's song has found him won, enlisted, prepossessed. He calls the masters to halt. "Not every one shares in your opinion! The Knight's song struck me as novel, yet not confused; although he forsook the beaten track, he strode along with firm, unerring step. . . ." Sachs nods to himself and beams at this reviewing of the intense pleasure he has just experienced. "When you find that you have been trying to measure by your own rules that which does not lie within the compass of your rules, the thing to do is to forget your rules and try to discover the rules of that which you wish to measure!" Which sage talk is not destined to be fruitfully heard in the agitation of prejudice, alarm, and dislike possessing the majority of the masters. "Oh, very well," fumes Beckmesser, "Now you have heard him: Sachs offering a loophole to bunglers, that they may slip in and out at will and flourish

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

at ease. Sing to the people as much as you please, in market-place and street; here no one shall gain admission save in accordance with rule!" Sachs insists that Walther must be heard to the end. "The guild of the masters, the whole body," chafes Beckmesser, "are as nothing counterbalanced by Sachs!" "God forbid," speaks Sachs, "that I should desire anything contrary to the guild's laws; but among those very laws it stands written that the Marker shall be so chosen that neither love nor hate may influence his judgment. Now, if the Marker go on lover's feet, how should he not yield to the temptation of bringing a rival to derision before the assembled school?" Beckmesser flares up, trembling with rage. "What concern of Master Sachs's is it on what sort of feet I go? Let him sooner turn his attention to making me shoes that will not hurt my toes. But since my shoe-maker has become a mighty poet, it's a sorry business with my foot-wear. See there, all down at the heel, the sole half off and shuffling! His many verses and rhymes I would cheerfully dispense with, likewise his tales, his plays, and his comical pieces, if he would just bring me home my new shoes for to-morrow!" The thrust tells. Sachs scratches his ear a little ruefully, but is not found quite without a word to say. The excuse he advances is that while it is his custom to write a verse on the sole of every shoe he delivers, he has not yet found a verse worthy of the learned town-clerk. "But," by a turn of the conversation directing it to a use nearer his heart, "I very likely shall catch inspiration from the Knight," he says, "when I have heard the whole of his song! Wherefore let him sing further undisturbed. Sing!" Slyly smiling he makes sign to Walther, "Sing, in Master Marker's despite!"

Walther springs to the singing-chair, but the masters cry in a voice, "An end! An end!" Walther, undaunted, climbs

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

to his feet upon the very seat of the sacred chair, from which he commands the assembly by half his height and haughtily looks down upon it. And he sings with all his lungs and all his fire to make himself heard above the hubbub; he sings, determined to impose the impress of himself upon their minds, will they or not; and his tenor pierces through and floats over the snarling chorus of objection; and he sings his song, in spite of them all, to the very end. "From the dark thorn-hedge rustles forth the owl, and by his hooting rouses the hoarse choir of the ravens; in night-black swarm they gather, and croak aloud with their hollow voices, magpies, crows, and daws! But thereupon soars upward on a pair of golden wings, wonderful, a Bird: his clearly-shining plumage gleams bright aloft in the air, rapturously he soars hither and thither, inviting me to join him in flight. My heart expands with a delicious pain, my longing to fly creates wings. I swing myself heavenward in daring flight, away from that death-vault, the city, away to the hills of home; thence to the green forest, meeting-place of birds, where long ago Walther, the Poet, won my allegiance. There sing I clear and loud the praise of my dearest lady, there mounts upward, little as Master Crows may relish it, the proud canticle of love!"

All this while the confusion of voices has not ceased or diminished. Beckmesser has been heatedly, in support of his chalk-marks, going over Walther's literary misdemeanours: Defective versification, unpronounceable words, misplaced rhymes, etc. etc. The masters have been vociferously criticising and rejecting the new-comer. Pagner has looked on and taken no part, a dejected spectator. He is sorry to see the Knight defeated, and he says to himself that he knows he will regret his toleration of this high-handedness of the masters. For the natural thought has risen in his mind that it would be agreeable to have this fine fellow received in the guild, and subsequently

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

into his family as son-in-law. Upon which thought naturally follows the other: "The victor whom I now must fall back upon, who knows if my child will care for him? I confess to a degree of uneasiness as to whether Eva will choose that master!"

Sachs alone has listened through all the manifold disturbance—has intently, delightedly listened; has loved the boy's courage, and marvelled at the force of his inspiration; has besought the masters to keep still and listen, or at least to let others listen. . . . "No use! It is labour lost! One can hardly hear his own words. The Knight can not from one of them gain attention! . . . That is what I call courage, to go on singing like that! His heart is in the right place,—a very giant of a poet. I, Hans Sachs, make verses and shoes, but he is a Knight and a poet on top of it!" The apprentices, emboldened by the general disorder, add their voices to the others, attempting to drown out the singer so fiercely, unremittingly singing from his post of vantage. They join hands again and dance in circle around the Marker's platform.

Through all this, over all this, the stubborn song, not for a moment weakening or wavering, has climbed its way, with the figurative Bird, to its climax-point. His throat shall burst, but he will be heard! His last note Walther holds for four bars: "*Das stolze Lie———bes Lied!*". . . Sung to an end it is, the lofty canticle of love. The singer jumps down from the chair. "A lasting farewell to you, my masters!" With a proud gesture, which rids him of them forever and consigns them to the dust-heap of their sordid narrowness and mediocrity, he stalks to the door. "*Versungen und verthan! Versungen und verthan!*" cry the masters, raising their hands according to custom in giving a vote; "*Versungen und verthan!*" He has failed in song, he is done with!

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

The song-trial is over. The apprentices in merry tumult take apart the Marker's closet, hurry off benches and seats, rapidly clearing the church of all signs of the meeting. The masters leave, except Sachs. He stands gazing abstractedly at the singing-chair, while a snatch of Walther's song sings itself over in his memory. His meditation is interrupted by the apprentices snatching up and carrying off the chair. With a half-melancholy smile and a gesture of delicate mockery at himself for the spell he has so completely fallen under, reluctantly the last master-singer turns to the door, and the curtain falls.

II

The second act shows the exterior of Pogner's house and of Sachs's, his neighbour across the street. It is the close of day; David, putting up the shutters, is thinking of the morrow and its pleasures so intently that he does not, for a moment, recognise Lene's voice calling him. He mistakes it for that of some teasing fellow-apprentice, until he turns around and beholds her, as so often! with a promising-looking basket on her arm. "I bring you something good. Yes, you may peep. That is for my precious treasure, but first, quick, tell me, what success had the Knight? Did you instruct him to some purpose? Was he made a master?"—"Ah, Mistress Lene, it's a bad case! He failed utterly and miserably!"—"He failed? . . ." "Ay, —why should you so particularly care?" She jerks away the basket from his outstretched hand: "Keep your hands to yourself! Here is nothing for you! God ha' mercy, our young lord defeated!" and hurries into the house, leaving him crest-fallen, an object of mockery to his companions, who have lost nothing of the interview. Goaded, he has finally plunged

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

among them with punishing fist, when Sachs's arrival upon the scene stops the disorder. The boys nimbly scatter. David is ordered indoors. "Close the shop and make a light. Put the new shoes on the lasts!" Both go in.

The peacefulness of evening is upon the scene. Pogner, with his daughter on his arm, returning from a walk, comes down the lane which divides his house from Sachs's. He hesitates at Sachs's door. "Shall we see whether neighbour Sachs be at home? I should be glad of a talk with him. Shall I go in? . . ." But he decides against it. "Why should I, after all? Better not! When a man undertakes a course out of the usual, how should he accept advice? . . . Was it not he who considered that I went too far? Yet, in forsaking the beaten track, was I not doing even as he does? Or, was I actuated peradventure—by vanity?" Pogner is not easy in his mind, it is plain. He invites his silent and preoccupied daughter to sit beside him a little space on the stone seat under the linden in front of their house; he tries to fortify his faltering heart with the review of his plan for the morrow, held in the poetic light in which he first saw and found it alluring. "Deliciously mild is the evening. It presages a most beautiful day to shine upon you to-morrow. Oh, child, does no throb of the heart tell you what happiness awaits you to-morrow, when the whole of Nuremberg, with its burghers and plebeians, its guilds, its populace and high officials, is to gather in your presence to see you award the prize, the noble laurel-wreath, to the master of your choice and your chosen bridegroom?" But he speaks to the Evchen of day before yesterday. So recently as that his scheme no doubt attracted the daughter of his blood even as it did him; she saw it with kindred eyes. Her youthful pride rejoiced in the part she was to play of lovely lady of romance, to know that she should become from that day a heroine of le-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

gend, her name for long years recurring in the songs of song-loving Nuremberg. As for the practical side of the question, she felt safe. She believed she knew which of the master-singers was sure of election by the majority of the masters, and him she had it in her heart to crown with a right good-will—so recently as day before yesterday. But to-day, at her father's "the master of your choice" she wistfully inquires, "Dear father, *must* it be a master?"—"Understand me well, *a master of your choice*," the uneasy parent replies.

Magdalene is making signs from the doorway to Eva. The girl becomes absent-minded, drops the subject in question, and suggests to her father that he go in to supper. Vexed with himself and her, he rises from her side. "We are not expecting any guest, are we?" he asks, a shade querulously. "Why, surely, the Knight?"—"How is that?"—"Did you not see him to-day?"—"No desire have I to see him!" the troubled father mutters. Then, in a flash, two and two leap together and make four to his startled mind. "What's this? . . . Nay, thick-witted am I grown!"—"Dear little father, go in and change your coat!" urges the pretty daughter. "Humph!" he murmurs, now as absent-minded as she, "What is this buzzing in my head?" and goes indoors.

Magdalene reports to Eva David's news: the Knight has been refused admission to the guild. "God help me! What shall I do!" cries Eva, in a sea of troubles; "Ah, Lene, the anxiety! . . . Where to turn to find out something?"—"From Sachs, perhaps?"—"Ah, yes, he is fond of me. Certainly, I will go to him."—"Beware of arousing suspicion. Your father will notice if we stay out any longer at present. Wait until after supper. I shall have something further to communicate to you then, a message which a certain person charged me with privately."—"Who? . . . The Knight?"—"No,

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

Beckmesser.”—“Something proper that must be!” the fair girl scoffs as they enter the house.

Sachs, in working-clothes, is seen moving within his shop. He orders David to place his table and stool beside the door, and go to bed. Reluctantly David goes off. He is troubled over Magdalene's unaccountable behaviour to him, and this sitting up late of his master's interferes with his slipping over to her for an explanation. Sachs takes his seat before the work-table, sets his materials aright, but having done it, instead of falling to work, leans back and lets the sweetness of the evening beguile him, dreams possess and waft him whither they will. That haunting strain from Walther's song, repeated slowly, as by one savouring it with pensive pleasure, again sings itself to his inward ear; it, indeed, is partly to blame for his mood of gentle unrest. The memory will not let him alone of that marvellous, that unprecedented experience of the afternoon. Unreservedly the grey-haired man's homage flies to the youngling who so easily outstrips them all, with their inveterate painstaking, their multitudinous canons. Not only without a shade of bitterness but with a tender elation, he lives over again the emotions created in him by that passionate song. To his true poet's heart it is a matter for exultation that just something beautiful should have been, and he there to witness and rejoice. He reconsiders it all with affectionate disquisition, fresh delight in every point. If just a shade of sadness belongs to the hour, it lies in the recognition that though the vision of beauty has by the contagion that is proper to it stimulated in him the impulse to be at once producing, he too, beautiful things, not by any longing could he, after a life of faithful effort in the service of Poesy, produce anything to compare with the unprepared effusion of that youth!

In the serenity of the lovely evening his thoughts breathe

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

themselves forth upon the scented June air: "What fragrance—how mild, how sweet, how abundant,—exhaled from the elder-tree! Its soft spell loosens my fibres, solicits me to seek expression for my thoughts. To what purpose, any expression of mine? A poor, simple fellow am I! Little in the mood for work as I am, you had best, friend, let me alone! Far wiser I should attend to my leather and desist altogether from poetry!" Resolutely he falls to work. But Friend Elder-tree does not therefore cease to shed scent. It casts its spell over him again almost at once. "No, there is no use in trying to work!" Sachs leans back and listens again to the echo in his memory of Walther's song. "I feel it," he meditates, lending ear to the persistent voice in his brain, "and cannot understand it. I cannot retain it—nor yet can forget it! And if for a moment I grasp it, to measure it is beyond me. But how should I hope to grasp that which struck me as illimitable? No rule fitted it, and yet it had not one fault! It sounded so old, and was yet so new,—like the song of birds in the sweet May-time. One who should hear it, and, smitten with madness, try to sing in imitation of that Bird, would meet with scorn and derision. . . . The law of Spring,—exquisite compulsion!—according to that were the rules of song laid in his breast. And he sang even as he must! And as he must, the power to do it came to him, I marked that quite particularly. . . . The Bird who sang to-day, his beak is fashioned aright! Great as was the dismay created by him among the masters, he was much to Hans Sachs's mind!"

Evchen has come out of her house and softly approached. Sachs looks up, joyfully surprised, at her greeting: "Good-evening, master; still so diligent?" There follows a spretty an exhibition of youthful feminine arts as one could wish to see. The cajoling inflections of the music alone would inform one

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

of what is in action. Eva has come to Sachs with an ulterior motive: to hear the details of the song-trial. She has no mind, of course, to avow her interest frankly. She must gain her end as she can, and, as a beginning, to flatter her man and challenge his fondness for her can never fall wholly wide of the mark. Sachs loves her dearly, that she knows, and she has, in the innocent presumption of her young beauty, not questioned that he would enter the song-tournament for her; and until yesterday she rested in placid contentment upon the intention of crowning this affection which never since her birth has failed her. Her narrow eighteen years have no conception of a devotion so generous and deep it would not dream, however fair the opportunity, of laying upon her youth the burden of his maturity, the oppression of his thoughtfulness. Sachs is unwilling, too, very likely, in his wisdom, to compromise the peace of his Indian summer by assuming the guardianship of an over-fair young wife. His neighbour's picturesque whim, the song-contest in prospect, has no doubt given Sachs sufficient uneasiness, but he finally, as we heard him declare to Pogner, rests satisfied with the maiden's privilege of refusal. Not one of the guild of master-singers seems to him worthy of this blooming young Eve. As for the father's "Never!" applied to her marriage if she shall not accept the master-singers' choice, Sachs knows his Pogner and his Eva, and is willing to entrust the matter to Time.

And so the ingenuous seductress finds the genial, clever, mellow neighbour's attitude toward her in this scene more canny than she can have expected, or quite relishes. It almost appears he had no idea of trying for her. Perhaps an intuition of her momentary insincerity has made him more than naturally wary. The practising upon himself of her pretty coquetries he suffers however without unreasonable distaste. "Ha, child,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

dear Evchen, out so late? But I know—I know what brings you so late. The new shoes?”—“You are mistaken! I have not even tried on the shoes. They are so beautiful, so richly ornamented, I have not yet ventured so much as to put them on my feet!”—“And yet you are to wear them to-morrow as a bride?” She takes a seat on the stone bench by his door and leans confidently close to him. “Who, then, is to be the bridegroom?”—“How should I know?”—“How can you know then that I am to be a bride?”—“What a question! The town knows it!”—“And if the town knows it, friend Sachs feels that he has good authority. I should have thought that he knew more than the town.”—“What should I know?”—“See, now, I shall be obliged to tell him! I am certainly a fool! . . .” —“I did not say so.”—“It is you then who are more than common knowing. . . .” —“I do not know.”—“You do not know! . . . You have nothing to say! . . .” She draws away, nettled: “Ah, friend Sachs, I now perceive that pitch is not wax! I had supposed you cleverer.” Calmly he takes up her words and by them guides the conversation from that ground. “Child, the properties both of wax and pitch I am well acquainted with. With wax I stroke the silken threads with which I stitch your dainty shoes; the shoes I am at this moment making, I sew with coarse cord, and use pitch to stiffen it, for the hard-fibred customer who is to wear them.”—“Who is it? Some one of great consequence, I suppose?”—“Of consequence, indeed! A proud master, on wooing bent, who has no doubt whatever of coming forth victorious from to-morrow’s event. For Master Beckmesser I am making these shoes.”—“Then use pitch in plenty, that he may stick fast in them and trouble me no more!” —“He hopes surely by his song to win you.”—“What can justify such a hope?”—“He is a bachelor, you see; there are not many in the place.” Again she draws near and bends close

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

to him. "Might not a widower be successful?" In his kind, sane, unsentimental voice he replies promptly: "My child, he would be too old for you!"—"What do you mean, too old? The question here is one of art. The man who has achieved distinction in art, let him contend for me." Sachs smiles, indulgently, paternally. "Dear little Eva, are you making a fool of me?" (*Machst mir blauen Dunst?* Are you blinding me with blue haze?)—"Not I! It is you—" she retorts warmly, "it is you who are playing tricks on me. Confess that you are of an inconstant nature. God knows who it is you have now housed in your heart. And I have been supposing for years it was I!"—"Because I used to be fond of carrying you in my arms?"—"I see! It was only because you had no children of your own!"—"Time was when I had a wife and children enough," Sachs reminds her gently. "But your wife died, and I grew up!"—"And you grew up, tall and most fair!"—"And so I thought you would take me into your house in place of wife and child. . . ."—"Thus I should have a child and a wife in one . . . A pleasant pastime, indeed! Ha ha! How beautifully you have planned it all!"—"I believe," she pouts, and bends her brows on him in a puzzled frown, "I believe that the master is making fun of me! In the end he will calmly acquiesce in Beckmesser to-morrow carrying me off, right under his nose, from him and all the rest!"—"How could I prevent it," says Sachs, not upset apparently by the fearful thought, "if he is successful? Your father alone could find a remedy to that."—"Where such a master carries his head!" cries Eva, in acute exasperation, "If I were to come to your house, should I so much as be made at home?" Somewhat dryly he takes up her words, as before, to steer the conversation from these dubious borders; and by some hazard, or intuition, turns it upon the subject nearest her heart. "Ah, yes, you are

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

right! My head is in a state of confusion. I have had much care and bother to-day. Something of it clings very probably to my wits.”—“At the singing-school, do you mean?” she asks, with covert eagerness; “There was song-trial to-day.”—“Yes, child, I had considerable trouble over an election.” She draws close to him. “Now, Sachs! You should have said so at once, and I would not have harassed you with senseless questions. Tell me now who it was that sought for election?”—“A knight, my child, wofully untaught!”—“A knight? You do not say so! And was he admitted?”—“Far from it, my dear. There was too much difference of opinion.”—“Well, tell me, then. Tell me how it all happened. If it troubles you, how should it leave me untroubled? So he stood the trial discreditably and was defeated. . . .”—“Hopelessly defeated, the gallant cavalier!” Walther’s failure is symbolised by a melodious groan. “Hopelessly, you say? There was no way then by which he might have been saved? Did he sing so badly, so faultily, that there is no possibility more of his becoming a master?”—“My child,” Sachs broadly assevers, “for him all is definitely lost. And never in any land will he be made a master. For he who is a master born occupies ever among masters the very lowest place.” On the verge of tears, with difficulty controlling her indignation, Eva continues her questioning: “One thing more tell me. Did he not find among the masters a single friend?” Sachs nearly laughs. “That were not bad! To be, on top of everything, his friend! His friend—before whom all feel themselves so small! . . .” (If Eva were not so engrossed with her single idea, the gleam in Sachs’s eye, the fire in his tone, would interpret to her this brutal-sounding speech.) “Young Lord Arrogance, let him go his way! Let him go brawling and slashing through the world! As for us, let us draw our breath in peaceful enjoyment of what we have acquired with labour

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

and difficulty. Keep off the fiery fellow from running amuck among us! Let fortune bloom for him elsewhere!" Trembling with anger, and dropping all concealment, Eva springs to her feet: "Yes, elsewhere shall fortune bloom for him than in the neighbourhood of you repulsive envy-ridden creatures!—elsewhere, where hearts still have some warmth in them, in spite of all cantankerous Master Hanses!—Directly, yes, I am coming!" (This to Magdalene, who has been calling to her from her father's door.) "I go home much comforted! It reeks of pitch here till God take pity on us! Kindle a fire with it, do, Master Sachs, and get a little warmth into you, if you can!"

"I thought so!" Sachs says to himself as he watches her cross the street to her own door. Two and two have leaped together in his mind, too. "The question is now what will be the sage course to pursue." He goes within and closes his door . . . all but a crack.

"Your father is asking for you," Magdalene reports to her agitated mistress. "Go to him," weeps Eva, "and say that I have gone to my room and to bed." But Beckmesser—the nurse reminds her of the message from him. He desires her to be at the window; he will sing and play to her a beautiful composition by which he hopes on the morrow to win her. He wishes to discover whether it be to her taste. Eva, anxiously awaiting the arrival of her lover, disposes of the subject by ordering Magdalene to be at the window in her place. "That would make David jealous!" reflects Magdalene; "His chamber is toward the lane." The prospect tickles her spirits. Even as she is urging Eva to go in, for her father is calling, Walther comes down the lane. Hopeless after that, Magdalene recognises, to attempt dragging indoors the damsel. She hurries in by herself to content Pogner with some discreet misrepresentation.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

With passionate endearments Walther and Eva have rushed into each other's arms. All is lost which depended upon his winning the title of master-singer. There is nothing further to hope from that quarter; no choice is left, they must fly together. "Away, where liberty is!" he cries, "That is where I belong, there where I am master in the house!" He grows hot with anger at remembrance of the masters' treatment of him, but, even more, with loathing at the thought of his beloved sitting to-morrow in their midst, looked upon by them with covetous eyes as a possible bride. "And I would endure it, do you think? I would not fall upon them all, sword in hand?" The night-watchman's horn breaks across his heated outburst. He claps hand to his sword. Eva draws him gently into the shadow of the linden-tree, to lie concealed until the watchman have passed, and leaves him a moment to go within.

The night-watchman, with pike, horn, and lantern, comes down the lane, calling the hour of ten; he bids the householders look to their fires and lights, avoiding disaster, and so let God the Lord be praised! He turns the corner, the sound of his horn dies away.

Sachs from behind his door has played the eavesdropper. "Evil doings are under way! No less than an elopement! Attention! This must not be!"

Eva creeps forth from her father's house, disguised for the journey in Magdalene's things. "No stopping for reflection!" she cries; "Away from here! Away! Oh, that we were already off and afar!"—"This way, through the lane. . . ." Walther draws her along with him. "At the city-gate we shall find servant and horses." But right across the lane falls suddenly a great shaft of light, projected from Sachs's window, cast by a lamp placed behind a glass globe which magnifies it to intense brilliancy. The lovers find themselves standing in a

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

bright illumination. Eva pulls Walther quickly back into the dark. "Woe's me, the shoe-maker! If he were to see us! . . . Hide! Do not go near that man!"—"What other road can we take?"—"The street there—but it is a winding one, I am not well acquainted with it, and, besides, we should run into the night-watchman."—"Well, then, through the lane!"—"The shoe-maker must first leave the window!"—"I will force him to leave it!" says Walther, fiercely. "He must not see you. He knows you."—"The shoe-maker? . . ."—"Yes, it is Sachs."—"Hans Sachs, my friend?"—"Do not believe it! He had nothing but evil to say of you!"—"What, Sachs? He, too? . . . I will put out his lamp!" She catches again at his arm, and even at that moment both are startled into immobility by the sound of a lute. Some one approaches, testing as he comes the strings of a lute, if they be in tune. The light has disappeared from the shoe-maker's window. Walther is again for dashing down the lane toward the city-gate and the horses. "But no! Can't you hear?"—his lady hangs back. "Some one else has come and taken up his station there."—"I hear it and see it. It is some street-musician. What is he doing so late at night?"—"It is Beckmesser!"—"What, the Marker? The Marker in my power? There is one whose loafing in the street shall not trouble us long. . . ." Again she catches in terror at his arm, so ready ever to catch at the sword. "For the love of Heaven, listen! Do you wish to waken my father? The man will sing his song and then will go his way. Let us hide behind the shrubs yonder." She draws her lover to the stone seat under the linden-tree.

Sachs at the sound of the lute has drawn in his light, become superfluous, since the road is effectually blocked for the lovers by the musical interloper. He overhears Eva's exclamation, "Beckmesser!" and has an idea. Beckmesser shall be made of

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

use to prevent the lovers as long as possible from moving any farther from the safe parental roof than that stone seat under the linden, where they huddle close, whispering together, while keeping a watchful eye on the actors of the comedy which follows. Sachs, as one might know of him, loves a joke. He softly opens his door, places his work-bench and lamp right in the doorway, and sets himself at his work. When Beckmesser, after impatiently preluding to bring to the window the figure he is expecting, clears his throat to begin the serenade, Sachs, vigourously hammering on his last, prevents him by bursting forth on his own account in a lusty ditty with much loud Ohe, Ohe, Trallalei!—a playful ditty, sweet at the core, about Eve, the original mother, and the first pair of shoes, ordered for her from an angel by the Lord himself, who was sorry to see the pitiful sinner, when turned out of Paradise, go bruising her little feet, for which He had a tenderness, on the hard stones; and Adam, too, stubbing his toes against the flints, the song tells how he on the same occasion was measured for boots. Beckmesser can hardly contain his impatience and disgust till the first verse comes to an end. Upon the last note of it, he addresses the shoe-maker with what sickly civility he can summon: “How is this, master? Still up? So late at night?” Sachs expresses an equal surprise to find the town-clerk moving abroad: “I suppose you are concerned for your shoes. I am at work on them, as you see; you shall have them to-morrow.” —“Devil take the shoes!” groans Beckmesser; “What I want here is quiet!” But his words are lost amid Sachs’s hammer-blows and unmoderated voice launching forth upon the second verse. “You are to stop at once!” Beckmesser, in mounting anger, orders Sachs, as, hardly pausing to take breath, the shoe-maker is attacking the third verse. “Is it a practical joke you are playing on me? Do you make no distinction between

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

the night and the day?" Sachs looks at him in innocent surprise. "What does it matter to you that I should sing? You are anxious, are you not, to have your shoes finished?"—"Shut yourself up indoors then and keep quiet!"—"Nay, night-labour is burdensome; if I am to keep cheerful at my work, I must have air and light-hearted song. So hear how the third verse goes!" And he attacks it with a will. There is added to Beckmesser's other troubles the fearful thought that the maiden may mistake this outrageous bellowing for his love-song. A second-story window in Pogner's house has softly opened, a form is dimly outlined within the frame of it. "I am lost now," Beckmesser desperately reflects, "if he goes on singing!" He resolutely steps up to Sachs: "Friend Sachs, just listen to one word! How bent you seem upon those shoes! I truly had forgotten all about them. As a shoe-maker, the fact is, I hold you in great esteem, but as an artist and critic I honour you even more highly. I beseech you therefore to give your attention to a little song by which I hope to-morrow to win the prize. I am eager to be told whether you think well of it." While talking, he strums, as if casually, upon his lute, to keep the lady from leaving the window. "Oh, no!" Sachs replies; "You wish to catch me by my weak side. I have no wish for another berating. Since your shoe-maker takes himself for a poet, it fares but ill with your footgear. I can see for myself that it is in a deplorable condition. And so I drop verse and rhyme, knowledge and erudition, and I make you the new shoes for to-morrow."—"Let that be, do!" Beckmesser adjures him; "That was only a joke. Understand now what my true sentiments are. You stand high in honour with the people, and the daughter of Pogner has a great opinion of you. Now, if I intend to offer myself as a suitor for her to-morrow, can you not see how I might be destroyed by her not taking kindly to my

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

song? Therefore listen to me quietly, do, and when I have finished my song tell me what in it you like, and what not, that I may make my dispositions accordingly.”—“Go along! Let me alone!” Sachs still excuses himself; “How should so much honour accrue to me? My songs are but common street-songs; let me therefore, in my common way, sing them to the street!” He is taking up his noisy lay again about Eve and shoes when Beckmesser’s rage explodes. Quaking, the town-clerk pours forth reproach and insult. This conduct of the shoe-maker’s has its source in envy, nothing else; envy of the dignity of Marker which has never been bestowed upon him, and which now never will be, not so long as Beckmesser lives and has influence with the masters. When he stops at last, for lack of breath, Sachs asks artlessly: “Was that your song? . . . Somewhat irregular in form, but it sounded right spirited!”

Walther, in the shadow, clasping his troubled lady, who is unaccountably saddened by the untimely farce, struggles with a hysterical desire to laugh—it is all so like a fantastic dream.

At last shoe-maker and town-clerk come to an arrangement. Beckmesser shall sing his song, and Sachs, whose criticism he so unwontedly desires, shall act as Marker; but Sachs, who contends that he is loath to stop work on his shoes, instead of marking with chalk, shall mark the singer’s mistakes by blows of his hammer on the last, and so, peradventure, while listening, forward his work. A disgusting arrangement, but Beckmesser is in such terror lest the lady leave her post before he have sung that he consents. “Begin!” hollaes Sachs, and Beckmesser, after preluding, sings, while Sachs punctuates the lines with smart taps on the last. These at first discompose the singer, and he stops at each tap to inquire angrily what it is that is not right; he shortly resolves, however, to pay no heed to the spiteful enemy, but cover over the interruptions with his voice.

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

Louder and louder and ever more breathlessly he sings, a lyric that is more prosy than prose, a piece of common statement of facts, tortured into verse, which attains metre only by throwing the accent continually, ludicrously, on the wrong syllables. The melody, nasal and snuffling, is the very prose, too, of music. A ridiculous, dead-in-earnest song, relating in three long verses the circumstances of the song-contest and the singer's tender hopes.

By the end of the second verse, the teasing shoe-maker has tapped so much that the soles are solid with the vamps. He swings the finished shoes triumphantly before his customer, announcing that he has thought of an appropriate verse to write on the soles, and it is: "A good song must keep time!" But Beckmesser does not stop for him. Beckmesser disdainfully goes on, as if he and the lady were alone in the world, and he sang thus loud to overpower some such thing as the sea-surf. In his engrossment he fails to take account of various ominous signs. He does not see David appear at his chamber-window. In spite of Eva's clothes which she is wearing, the boy recognises Magdalene at the casement across the way. His jealousy is quick to suppose her cold treatment of himself due to an inclination toward this new admirer. The neighbours, too, begin to lean out of their windows and ask the reason of this abominable caterwauling. A crowd collects in the street, of persons trying to find out what is the matter. The apprentices come flocking, mischievous instigators to mischief, and the journey-men, little better than they. Soon, there is difference and quarreling among those arriving to inquire the cause of the disturbance. Neighbours pour into the street, men and women in night-attire; finally, the heavy burghers arrive, the masters themselves, noisy, almost disorderly, in their attempts to restore order. Beckmesser, singing at the top of his lungs, does not

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

wake to consciousness of his surroundings until a cudgel falls across his back, wielded by David. He flees—but is at every few steps overtaken again and beaten. The two figures, in flight and pursuit, waving lute and brandishing cudgel, disappear and reappear at intervals among the swaying crowd. In vain Magdalene from above screams to David to let the gentleman go. Pogner's hand draws her away from the window; in the dim light he mistakes her for Eva. Sachs, when the confusion is well under way, draws in his work-bench and closes his door . . . again all but a crack, through which he can watch the two figures wrapped in a single cloak beneath the linden-tree. When the disorder is at its height, Walther clasps the girl with his left arm, with his right bares his sword, and attempts a rush through the crowd, toward the gates and horses of freedom. Quick as thought, Sachs has cleared his way to the couple; he grasps Walther by the arm. Pogner at the same moment appears at his door, calling for Lene. Sachs pushes toward him Eva, half-fainting, bereft by panic of all power to withstand the impulsion. Pogner receives her in his arms and draws her within doors, not suspecting but that she is the faithful nurse whose garments she wears. With deft foot Sachs propels David before him into the house; then, forcibly drawing Walther with him across the threshold, fastens the door,—his object happily accomplished.

The street-battle is still raging. But at this point women pour water from the windows on the heads of the combatants, as they would on fighting dogs. Simultaneously, the horn of the night-watchman is heard. In the space of a yawn the scene is deserted; all down the street are fast-closed windows and doors; Beckmesser hobbles off rubbing his back. The old night-watchman, reaching the spot, rubs his eyes, clearly wondering if he have dreamed that he heard alarming sounds

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

from that quarter. After looking all around, he droningly calls the hour of eleven, enjoins the people to be on guard against phantoms and spooks, that no evil spirit may work harm to their souls, and so let God the Lord be praised! The full moon rising above the housetops suddenly floods the quiet lane. The watchman slowly goes down it. As he vanishes around the corner, the curtain falls.

III

The interior of Sachs's workshop. The poet sits in an ample armchair, near the window, bathed in the morning sunshine, absorbed in a great book. The magnanimity of his mood, the beautiful deep calm following upon certain resolutions and sacrifices, the gently exalted melancholy of his meditations—half remembrance, and dreamy as if violet shades of evening softened them,—the composer has given us to apprehend all in the introduction to the third act.

So rapt is Sachs in the perusal of his great volume, or, as may be suspected, in images which float between the page and his eyes, that he does not see David enter carrying a basket of Lene's bestowal filled with flowers and ribbons for the adornment of his person on this festival day, as well as with cake and sausage. The apprentice, when Sachs does not speak, or, spoken to, answer, or make sign when he informs him that Beckmesser's shoes have been duly delivered, believes him to be angry, and goes into a long apology for his misconduct on the night before, brightening finally with the relation of his making-up this morning with Lene, who has satisfactorily explained all. Sachs reads on, as little disturbed as by the buzzing of a fly on the pane. Only when he has finished, and closed his book,—the unexpected clap of the covers so startles David that he

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

stumbles to his knees—Sachs looks around him, as if coming back from a dream. His eye is caught by the bright flowers and ribbons brought in by David. Their effect of young gayety touches some chord in him more than usually sensitive at this moment. “Flowers and ribbons I see over there,” he muses audibly; “Sweet and youthful they look! How come they in my house?” David is relieved to find him in this gentle mood, yet puzzled at the remoteness and abstraction from which the master is but slowly drawn. He has occasion for a moment to wonder even whether the master have perchance become hard of hearing. . . .

Fully returned at length to a sense of the common surrounding world, Sachs asks David for his day’s lesson, and the apprentice briskly sings his verse, first comically confusing the tune with that of Beckmesser’s serenade, still buzzing in his head, then, at Sachs’s gesture of astonishment, righting himself and acquitting himself of his task without slip. The verse is a playful bit, between psalm and street-song. It relates that when Saint John was baptising on the banks of Jordan there came to him a lady from Nuremberg bringing her little son for baptism. When she got home, however, to German land, it proved that vainly had one on the banks of Jordan been given the name of Johannes, on the banks of the Pegnitz he became Hans! The pronouncing of the name brings to David’s mind the remembrance suddenly that it is his master’s name, that the day is therefore his name’s-day. In an impulse of affectionate devotion he presses on him all the gay articles just received from Lene, the flowers and ribbons, the magnificent cake, and, but shyly, as if it were not quite worthy of a poet, the sausage. With great gentleness, Sachs thanks the lad and bids him keep the things for himself, adding a request that he make himself fine with those same flowers and ribbons to accompany him

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

presently to the meadow outside the city gates where the song-contest is to be held. His stately herald he shall be. Sachs's friendliness encourages the boy to venture a small liberty. "May I not rather go as your groom's-man? Master, dear master, you must marry again!"—"You would be glad of a mistress in the house?" asks Sachs dreamily.—"It would make, in my opinion, a much more imposing household!" There is popular talk and expectation of it, as an outcome of the coming song-contest, David intimates; "You will hardly have much trouble, as I think, in singing Beckmesser out of the field; I hardly believe he will make himself very conspicuous to-day!"—"I hardly believe so, either," Sachs smiles: "But go now, and be careful not to disturb his lordship. Come back when you have made yourself fine."

Left alone, Sachs sinks into thought again, sitting there with his book on his knees and his head propped on his hand. We are allowed to follow his reflections, those of a philosopher,—but not one standing apart and watching a little scornfully the vagaries of men; a very human being, taking part in them, without losing a humorous sense of their character. "Illusion! Illusion! Everywhere illusion! Whichever way I bend my inquiry, searching the chronicles of the city and those of the world, to discover the reason why people, in vain and frantic rage, torment and oppress themselves and one another to the point of bloodshed! No one has any good of it, or receives any thanks for it. Through its working, the defeated and put to flight fancies himself chasing the foe. He is deaf to his own cry of pain. When he twists the knife in his own flesh, he has an idea that he is doing himself a pleasure! Who shall find a name for it? One name, forsooth, befits it: Ancient Illusion it is, without which nothing happens, nothing either goes or stands still. If it halts in its career, it merely while slumbering

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

gathers new force; it presently wakes up, and then see who can master it! . . .” He smiles whimsically, nodding to himself, at the contemplation of the instance of all this uppermost in his mind, the events of the evening before. “How peaceful, in its adherence to good customs, approved in conduct and deed, lies in the heart of Germany my beloved Nuremberg! But late upon a night, a man there is found totally void of counsel how to prevent a catastrophe, resulting from youth and hot blood. A shoe-maker in his shop tugs gently at the threads of illusion: how promptly up and down the lanes and streets the thing begins to rage; men, women, boys and children, fall upon one another like mad and blind; and the crack-brained spirit is not to be laid until a shower fall of blows—a shower of blows, kicks and cudgel-thwacks, to smother the angry conflagration. God knows how it all came about?” He smiles again, reflectively, over the recollection of the lovely quiet evening it was, the terrific discordant pother that arose,—the lovely and hushed night that presently resumed her reign. The incident looks fantastic now. “An imp must have had a hand in it!” is the poet’s fanciful induction; “A glow-worm could not find his mate, it was he responsible for all the damage done! It was the fault of the elder-tree—of Saint John’s night! . . . But now—” he broadly dismisses the fancies and aberrations of the warm mid-summer night, and turns his face toward the clear-defined duty of the day: “But now it is Saint John’s Day! And now let us see how Hans Sachs shall contrive deftly to guide Illusion to the working out of a noble purpose. For if the spirit will not let us rest even here in Nuremberg, let it be for such works as seldom succeed by vulgar means, and succeed never without some grain of illusion in the perpetrator himself!”

Walther appears at the door of an inner chamber. Sachs

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

risers to meet and greet his guest. They had a good talk the night before, after the wise shoester's act of well-meant violence. Walther was grateful, no doubt, upon calmer reflection, to have been saved from the ruinous folly he had projected. The two men are obviously fast friends. There is in Sachs's attitude a touching deference toward the younger man, the heart-wholly acknowledged superior in talent. It is a pleasant spectacle, the grey meistersinger's eager glorying in the golden youth's simple, abundant, God-bestowed gift. The motif of his address to Walther has a touch of charming courtliness. "God keep your lordship! Did you find rest? You were up late—you did, however, finally sleep?"—"A little," Walther answers, "but soundly and well." There is something hushed and fixed in Walther's aspect, as if he listened to voices no one else could hear, gazed upon some vision invisible to others. He is still under the spell of a recent marvellous impression. "I have had—" he tells Sachs, when the latter genially asks is he feeling, after his good sleep, in good form and of good courage, "I have had a wonderfully beautiful dream. . . ."—"A good omen, that! Tell me your dream!"—"I hardly dare to touch it with my thought, so do I fear to see it fade away."—"My friend," the older poet with fine amenity takes up the part of teacher, and his observations have a ripe, sunny, elevated wisdom, for which one should store them carefully as one does good fruit, "that exactly is the task of a poet, to mark dreams and interpret them. Believe me, of all the illusions of man the most nearly approaching truth are those he comes into cognisance of through dreams. The whole art of poetry is but the interpretation of true-dreaming. What if this dream now should contain a hint how you may to-day be made a master?"—"No, no," Walther rejects the idea with distaste; "In the presence of the guild and its masters, scant inspiration would animate my

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

dream-picture!"—"But yet, suppose your dream contained the magic spell by which you might win over the guild?" Walther shakes his head: "How do you cling to an illusion, if after such a rupture as you witnessed you still cherish such a hope!"—"Nay, my hope stands undiminished, nor has anything so far occurred to overthrow it; if that were not so, believe me, instead of preventing your flight, I would myself have taken flight with you! Pray you, therefore, let your resentment die! You are dealing with honourable men. They make mistakes and are fairly settled in the comfortable determination to be taken in their own way. Those who offer prizes desire after all that one shall please them. Your song scared them, and with reason, for, upon reflection, the like flaming poetry and passion are adapted for the luring of daughters into mad adventures, but the sentiment leading to the blessed married state finds words and notes of a different sort!" Walther grins: "I know the sort—from hearing them last night; there was a good deal of noise out in the street." Sachs laughs too; "Yes! yes! . . . You heard likewise how I beat time. But let be all that, and follow my advice, good and short: summon up your energies for a master-song!"—"A beautiful song, and a master-song, how am I to seize the distinction between them?" asks the singer of the beautiful song which had been despised. "My friend," Sachs explains, with a warmth as of tears and blood, "in the beautiful days of youth, when the bosom expands high and wide with the mighty transports of happy first love, many are they who can achieve a beautiful song: the Spring-time it is which sings for them! But let summer come, autumn and winter, the sorrows and cares of life,—no dearth of wedded joys along-side!—christenings, business, discord and difficulties, those who still after all that can compass the singing of a beautiful song, those, mark me, are en-

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

titled masters!" Aye, first, as a modern poet has said, warm natural drops of blood; later, the alchemist's laborious spheres of chemic gold. In youth, all-sufficient inspiration,—later, labour and rule, with meritorious concentration substituting for impetus and fire the beauty of careful form, and making durable in this the evanescent dreams of youth. "Learn the master-rules in good season," Sachs adds, "that they may be faithful guides to you, helping you to preserve safely that which in the gracious years of youth spring-time and love with exquisite throes bred in your unconscious heart, that you may store and treasure it, and it may not be lost!"—"But who—" Walther asks, inclined to cavil where anything is concerned which relates to the master-singers, "Who created these rules which stand in such high honour?"—"They were sorely-needy masters," Sachs in his moved tones continues the charming lesson, "spirits heavily weighted with the weariness of life; in the wilderness of their distresses they created for themselves an image, that they might retain vivid and lasting the memory of young love, bearing the sign and stamp still, and breathing the fragrance, of Spring!"—"But," Walther objects, suspicious of that whole tribe of snuffy masters, for whom Sachs has the same charity of a broad understanding which he has shown in Walter's own case, "however can he for whom Spring is long past fix the essence of it in an image?"—"He recreates it as well as he can," Sachs sums with sudden curtness, recognising perhaps the futility of his attempt against this so lively dislike; and passes on to the point more important at this moment, to his thinking. "I beg you, therefore, sorely-needy man that I am, if I am to teach you the rules, that you should renew in me the sense of that which originally gave them rise. See, here are ink, pen, and paper. I will be your scribe, do you dictate."—"Hardly should I know how to begin."—"Relate to me your

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

morning dream.”—“Nay, as a result of your teaching of rules, I feel as if it had faded quite away.”—“The very point where the poet’s art comes into requisition! Recall your beautiful dream of the morning, for the rest, let it be Hans Sachs’s care!”

Walther takes a moment to collect himself. Sachs sits with quill poised over paper. Then Walther relates his dream, meeting Sachs’s request for a master-song by casting it as he goes, with the light ease of genius, into verse and melody,—his second astonishing improvisation, joyous as the first, but not agitated—reflective, as if he filled Sordello’s account of himself: “*I’ mi son un che quando Amore spira, noto, e quel che detta dentro vo significando.*” I am one who when Love breathes, do note, and that which he dictates within do go expressing. All things lovely seem to have congregated in this dream of his; it is no wonder that the lingering impression of it enveloped him with an atmosphere of Paradise, and that he feared almost to breathe lest it be dispelled. Just the words he has to use, without their relations, conjure up a flock of alluring images: Morning-shine, roseate light, blossoms, perfume, air, joy,—unimaginable joy, a garden! The idea that a poet’s song is as much a part of him as fruit is of the tree stands illustrated by the fact that the song which falls on our ear as in its ensemble so fresh, is yet composed in great part of the Walther-motifs with which we have become familiar; his youth, his enthusiasm, his courage and his love, all go into the making of his song. As he said in answer to Kothner, what should be put into his song unless the essence of all he had known and lived?

Glimmering beneath the rosy light of dawn, the air being laden with the scent of flowers, a garden, he sings, full of never before imagined attractions, had invited him to enter it. . . .

“That was a stanza.” Sachs states, as Walther pauses. “Take

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

careful heed now that the one following must be exactly like it.” —“Why exactly alike?” the free-born asks, ready to chafe at the shadow of a restriction. Sachs, indulgent, makes play for this prodigious child’s sake of the to him so grave business of song-making: “That one may see that you have selected a mate!”

In that blissful garden a magnificent tree had proffered to his desire a sumptuous harvest of golden fruit. . . . Such is the matter of the second stanza.

“You did not,” Sachs critically considers, “close on the same tone. Excruciating is that to the masters, but Hans Sachs learns from your doing it that in Spring-time it must perforce be so! Proceed now to the aftersong.”—“What is that?” asks Walther. “Your success in finding a well-suited couple will appear now from their off-spring!”

In the garden, by an exquisite miracle, he had found suddenly standing at his side a woman, more sweetly and graciously beautiful than any he had ever beheld. Like a bride she had entwined her arms softly about him, and had guided him, with eyes and hand, toward the fruit of his desire, the fair fruit of the tree of life. . . .

Joyfully stirred as he is by the beauty of dream and song, Sachs controls his emotion, to secure all he can from the young poet’s momentary docility. “There’s what I call an after-song!” he exclaims cordially; “See, now, how rounded and fine is the whole first part. With the melody you deal, to be sure, a bit freely. I do not say, however, that it is a fault. But it makes the thing more difficult to retain, and that incenses our old men. Let us have now a second part, that we may gain a clear idea of the first. I do not even know, so skilfully have you cast them into rhyme, what in your song was invention and what was dream. . . .”

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

With heavenly glow of sunset-light, day had departed, as he lay there drinking joy from her eyes, desire the sole power in possession of his heart. Night had closed down, baffling the eyesight, when, through the branches, the rays of two bright stars had shed their light upon his face. The sound of a spring upon the quiet height had reached his ear, murmuring more musically than any spring heard theretofore; stars had appeared in multitude, dancing among the boughs overhead, until, instead of golden fruit, the laurel-tree had swarmed with a host of stars. . . .

"Friend!" cries Sachs, striving against the full betrayal of his pleasure, lest it be an interrupting element, "your dream was an effectual guide! The second part is successful as the first. If now," he ventures, "you would compose a third, it might contain the interpretation of your dream. . . ." But Walther jumps up from his chair, suddenly weary of the game. "Enough of words!" And Sachs, with sympathetic understanding of the incalculable ways of poets, refrains from pressing him. That overbubbling inspiration he believes can be counted upon. "Reserve then word and deed for the proper place. And I pray you hold fast in memory this melody, a charming one it is to fit with words. And, against the moment of singing it in a more extended circle, hold fast likewise to your dream!"—"What have you in mind?" Walther inquires. Sachs does not directly enlighten him, but: "Your faithful servant has, very seasonably, arrived with packs and portemanteaux. The garments in which you intended to make yourself brave for wedding-ceremonials at home, he has brought here to the house. A little doubt directed him to the nest where his master slept. Come with me therefore to your chamber. Fitting it is we both attire ourselves splendidly, when a splendid deed is to be dared!" Walther without ques-

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

tion places his hand, as if it held his whole confidence, in Sachs's. They pass together out of the workshop.

The stage remains for a moment empty. The air retains as if echoes, or fragrances, of the personalities which have but just withdrawn; it is sweetened with effluvia of Walther's youth, of Sachs's greatness of heart. Suddenly, like a bar of bilious green across a shimmering mother-o'-pearl fabric, harmonies of a very different sort catch the attention, and Beckmesser's face is seen peering in at the window. Finding the workshop empty, he limps in. He is in holiday array, but there is little of holiday about him, save in his gaudily beribboned clothes. A long comedy-scene follows, in which Beckmesser says never a word, but his thoughts are heard and his actions are eloquent. His body is one mass of aches and pains, his soul the battleground of anger, shame, thirst for vengeance. The din of the evening before fills his ears; he is chased, as if by furies, by memories of the indignities put upon him. He is so sore he cannot sit; when he goes his joints hurt rackingly. His restless moving about the room while he waits for Sachs brings him to the master's writing-table: his eye falls on the sheet of music on which Sachs has taken down Walther's song; his attention is arrested; he reads it off mentally with ever-increasing agitation. No mistake possible, in his mind: Sachs, who had declared that he would not enter the song-contest for Pogner's daughter, has outrageously lied, and here is the proof of it, this song which he means to sing at the tournament. "Now," bursts forth Beckmesser, "everything becomes clear to me!" He jumps, hearing Sachs at the door, and stuffs the paper into his pocket. Sachs, in his handsome best-coat, meets him pleasantly. "You surely are not having any more trouble with the shoes?" Beckmesser's wrath holds in but a moment before voiding itself upon Sachs in accusation and threat. "Be sure,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

friend Sachs, I know you now! . . . That I may not stand in your way, you go so far even as to incite the mob to riot. . . . You have always been my enemy. . . . Now hear, whether I see through you. The maiden whom I have chosen, who was verily born for me, to the frustration of all widowers there be,—of her you are in pursuit! In order that Master Sachs might gain the goldsmith's rich inheritance it was that at the council of masters he stood upon minor clauses. For that reason, fool that I was! with bawling and hammering he tried to drown my song,—that the child might not be made aware of another's ability! Yes, yes! Have I hit the mark? And finally from his cobbler's shop he egged after me boys with cudgels, that he might be rid of me. . . . Ouch! Ouch! Green and blue was I beaten, made an object of derision to the beloved woman, so drubbed and maltreated that no tailor's flat-iron can smoothe me out! Upon my very life an attempt was made! But I came out of it with sufficient spirit left to reward you for the deed. Stand forth to-day and sing, do, and see how you prosper. Beaten and bruised as I am, I shall certainly manage to throw you out of time!" Sachs has unperturbedly let him spend himself. "My good friend, you are labouring under a delusion. You are free to attribute to me what actions you please . . . but I have not the least thought of competing." "Lies and deceit!" roars Beckmesser, "I know better!" Sachs quietly repeats his statement. "What else I have in mind is no affair of yours. But concerning the contest you are in error."—"Not in the contest? No competition-song?"—"Certainly not." Beckmesser produces the piece of music. "Is that your hand?"—"Yes," Sachs owns, amused; "Was that it?"—"I suppose you call it a biblical lay?"—"Nay," laughs Sachs, "any one guessing it to be such would hit wide enough of the mark."—"Well, then?"—"What is it?"—"Do you ask me?"—"What

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

do you mean?"—"That you are, in all candour, a rogue of the first magnitude!" Sachs shrugs good-humouredly; "May-be! I have never, however, pocketed what I found upon another's table. That one may not think evil of you, dear sir, keep the paper, I make you a gift of it." Beckmesser leaps in the air with incredulous joy: "Lord God! A poem of Sachs's! . . . But soft, that I may not be led into fresh troubles. You have, no doubt," he insinuates, "committed the thing perfectly to memory?"—"Have no uneasiness with regard to that."—"You bestow the sheet on me then outright?"—"To prevent you being a thief."—"And suppose I made use of it?"—"You may do as you please."—"I may sing it, then?"—"If it is not too difficult."—"And if I should please my audience?"—"I should be greatly astonished!"—Beckmesser misses the sly shoester's intention. "You are too modest altogether," he says; and goes on to explain in what dire need he stands of a new composition, since the song sung the night before as a serenade can have no chance, if sung again to-day, of charming the Pognerin, for whom it must be associated, thanks to the cobbler's merry jests, with every undignified circumstance. And how can he, poor belaboured wretch, find the necessary peace of mind to compose a new one? Yet, if he have not a new song, he must give up the hope of marriage. But a song of Sachs's would enable him to overcome every obstacle; if he may have it, let all the disagreements which have kept them apart be forgotten and buried. But,—he suddenly holds in, and puckers his forehead,—if this were a trap? "Even so late as yesterday," he says to Sachs, "you were my enemy. How is it that after all the troubles between us you are to-day kindly disposed toward me?"—"I worked on your shoes until late at night," Sachs disingenuously replies; "is that the sort of consideration one shows an enemy?"—"True, true. But

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

now give me your word. Whenever and under whatever circumstances you hear that song, you will never by any chance say that it is of your composing.”—"I give you my word and oath," Sachs assents, with a spice of wicked glee, "that I will never boast of that song being mine."—Beckmesser's spirits rise to heights of mad exhilaration. "What more do I want? I am saved! Beckmesser need trouble no further!"—"Friend," Sachs warns him, "in all kindness I advise you, study that song carefully. It is of no easy execution."—"Friend Sachs," Beckmesser waives the warning, "you are a good poet, but in all that relates to tones and tunes there is no one goes ahead of me. But now, quickly home, to learn the thing by heart. Hans Sachs, my dear fellow, I have misunderstood you. My judgment was thrown off the track by that adventurer. Just such a one was needed! But we masters made short work of him! Good-bye! I must be off! Elsewhere will I show my gratitude for your sweet friendliness. I will vote for you hereafter, I will buy your works. I will make you Marker!" Effusively he embraces him: "Marker, Marker, Marker Hans Sachs!"

Hans Sachs looks after the departing figure with a meditative smile. "So entirely ill-natured have I never yet found any one. He cannot fail to come to grief of some sort. Many there be who squander their wits, but they reserve enough to keep house with. The hour of weakness comes for each one of us, when he turns fool and is open to parley." So entirely ill-natured Beckmesser has been found that Sachs feels no compunction at letting him run into the pitfall gaping ahead. He is willing to win an advantage by a deception, let him follow his head, why should honest Sachs be tender of him? The joke is not severe beyond his deserts. He has candidly rejoiced that short work was made of that adventurer, Von

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

Stolzing; why should he not be permitted to encounter the same sort of treatment? Why indeed should not his dishonesty be turned to use? "That Master Beckmesser here turned thief," reflects Sachs, "falls in excellently with my plan."

Eva appears in the doorway, Eva dazzling in her white wedding-dress. "I was wondering," says Sachs to himself at sight of her, "where she could be!" For, as Walther was known to be in the house, it was thought she must before long find some pretext to stand beneath the same roof. She wears a little languid air; last evening was a sore trial to young nerves. A tinge of accusing plaintiveness is in her voice. She is markedly abstracted; her thoughts are wandering, of course, all about the house in search of *him*. She has her pretext ready, and meets Sachs's warm compliment upon her appearance with a reproachful: "Ah, master! So long as the tailor has done his work successfully, who ever will divine where I suffer inconvenience, where secretly my shoe pinches me?"—"The wicked shoe!" Sachs is for a moment really deceived; "It was your humour yesterday not to try it on."—"You see? I had too much confidence. I was mistaken in the master."—"I am sorry, indeed I am!" He is on his knee at once: "Let me look at it, my child, that I may help you, right off, quick!"—"As soon as I stand on it, it obliges me to go; and as soon as I go, it obliges me to stand."—"Place your foot here on the stool, I will remedy the evil at once. Now, what is wrong with it?"—"You can see, it is too wide!"—"Child, that is pure vanity. The shoe is snug."—"That is what I said, and that is why it pinches my toes."—"Here, at the left?"—"No, the right."—"At the instep?"—"No, the heel."—"What?" he asks incredulously, "Something wrong too with the heel?"—"Ah, master," she exclaims, "do you know better than I where my shoe pinches me?"—"I can only wonder," he replies, good-humour-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

edly, "that your shoe should be loose and yet pinch you everywhere!" The door of the inner room opens at this moment, and Walther stands upon the threshold in the rich gala costume of a young noble. Eva at sight of him in his splendour utters a cry, and remains spell-bound, gazing. He stops short in the doorway, spell-bound equally at sight of her in her shimmering bride's-robe of white,—and from their eyes, fixed unwaveringly upon each other, their hearts travel forth on luminous beams to meet and mingle. Sachs's back is toward Walther; he has not seen him, but the tell-tale light on Eva's face, reflection of a sun-burst, has reported to him of the apparition. He pretends not to see. "Aha! Here is the trouble!" he speaks, as if nothing were; "Now I see what the matter is! Child, you were right, the seams are stiff. Just wait and I will set the matter aright. Stay where you are, I will take the shoe and put it on the last for a minute. After that it will give you no further trouble." He draws the shoe tenderly from her childish foot, and leaves her standing, statue-still, lost in her trance of contemplation, with her foot on the stool, while he takes the shoe to his bench and pretends to work at it. He cannot forbear,—while he plays his little comedy, and those two angelically beautiful beings, saved and aided by him, between whom he shares his big heart, stand hushed, drinking, in oblivion of all, the heavenly nectar of each other's glances,—he cannot forbear teasing the little lady a bit, giving her a little lesson, taking a very mild vengeance on her for the faintly perfidious wiles of yesterday. So he runs on, while making himself busy with her shoe: "Forever to be cobbling! That is my fate. Night nor day, no deliverance for me! Child, listen! I have thought over what shall bring my shoe-making to an end. The best thing I can do will be after all to enter the contest for your hand. I might thus at least win something for myself as a poet! . . .

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

You are not listening? Yet it was yourself put the idea in my head. . . . Oh, very well! I see! Attend to your shoes! If at least," he slyly suggests, without turning, "some one would sing to me while I work! I heard to-day a regularly beautiful song. If just a third verse, equally successful, might be added to it!" Like the hypnotised receiving a suggestion, Walther, ready as a bird, breaks forth singing, his gaze never swerving from Eva: "Did the stars come to a pause in their charming dance? Light and clear, above the clustering locks of the most beautiful of all women, glittered with soft brilliancy a crown of stars . . ."

"Listen, child," Sachs bids Eva, in the short pause between the verses, "that is a master-song!"

"Miracle upon miracle! A double radiance of day now illumines me, for, even as two suns of purest delight, two divinely beautiful eyes bend their light upon me. . . ."

"That," says Sachs, "is the sort of thing you hear sung in my house nowadays!"

"Oh, gracious vision which my heart found boldness to approach! The wreath, which in the rays of the twin suns shows pale at once and green, tenderly and mildly she weaves about the consort's head. Into the breast of the poet—born erst to joy, now elect to glory,—Paradisal joy she pours, in Love's dream!"

Sachs has been enabled to keep in hand his emotion at the sound of the ecstatic song by diligently busying himself with the shoe, uttering at intervals small insignificant remarks: "Let us see, now, whether I have got my shoe aright. I believe I have finally succeeded, eh? Try it, now!" He has slipped it on to her foot, "Walk on it! Tell me, does it still hurt?" But Eva, who has stood breathlessly gazing and listening to the thrilling accents, new to her, of her lover, when the heart-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

searching voice is silent and the tension relaxes, bursts into passionate weeping, sinks on Sachs's breast and clings to him, sobbing. Walther with a quick stride is beside them; impulsively he grasps the hand of the good Sachs, to whom he dimly feels he owes so much,—to whom he owes really more than he dreams.

For a moment not one of them can speak. Then it becomes too much for Sachs, this soft beloved form trembling against his breast; he gently frees himself and allows the burden he relinquishes to slide upon the shoulder of Walther. Like a noble dog shaking his fur, he takes himself away and finds occupation at the further end of the room, trying by his commonplace playful talk to dispel the oppression of a too great emotion. Again he must, all for her good, tease Evchen a bit. "Has not a shoe-maker his fill of troubles?" he grumbles; "Were I not at the same time a poet, not another shoe would I make. So much hard work, such a perpetual calling upon you! This one's shoe is too loose, that one's too tight, here it claps, it hangs at the heel, there it presses, it pinches. The shoe-maker must know everything, mend everything that is torn, and if he be in addition a poet, then verily he is not allowed a moment's peace. But if, on top of all, he be a widower, then he is in all truth regarded as a very fool! The youngest of maidens, if a husband is wanted, request him to apply for them; let him understand them or let him not, it is all the same; let him say yes, let him say no, in the end he is told that he smells of pitch, and is called stupid, cantankerous, and impertinent! I wouldn't care so much," he concludes humourously, "but for my apprentice. He is losing all respect for me! . . ."

The conscience-smitten girl flings her arms around him again: "Oh, Sachs, my friend, oh, noble heart, how can I ever repay you? Without your love, what were I? What were I,

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

without you? I should have remained a child forever, had you not awakened me. Through you I won the things one prizes, through you I learned what a soul is. Through you I awoke, through you alone I learned to think nobly, freely, courageously. You guided my growth, and brought me to flowering. Oh, dear master, scold me, well you may! . . . But yet I was on the right track. For, had I any choice, you, no other, should be my husband. I would hold out the prize to you alone. As it is, I myself have been chosen—to never-before-dreamed-of torment! And if this day I am wedded, it will be without choice of my own. Coercion I have suffered, have suffered violence. You know, master, that the force of it frightened even you!”—"My child," he replies, mildly, collectedly—if feelingly and a little sadly, to her impulsive confession, while a known, poignant strain, like a profound sigh, holds the ear for a moment, an echo from a different opera, "of Tristan and Isolde I know the sorrowful story. Hans Sachs was shrewd and would have none of King Mark's happiness!" With a return to the lightness which is his policy of the moment, he adds, lest emotion too far unnerve them all: "Full time it was that the right one should appear, or I should after all have run into the snare! . . . Aha! There comes Lene looking for you. Hey, David, aren't you coming?" Nurse and apprentice enter, one from outside and one from within, in their holiday garments.

"The witnesses are here, the sponsors present, now quickly to the christening! Take your places!" Sachs directs. All look at him in wonder. He lays before them his idea of giving, with proper ceremony, a name to the master-song born in his house. It is a poet's fancy, an act of tender superstition on Sachs's part, a form by which he tries to lay a helpful charm or blessing upon the new-born creation on which so much de-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

pend; send it forth equipped as well as possible with spiritual arms, that it may, as he says, "grow great without harm or mishap." The young melody's father, of course, is Walther; the Pognerin and he, Sachs, will stand its sponsors; Lene and David shall be witnesses. But as an apprentice is not a proper witness, David is promoted with the rite of a smart box on the ear from apprentice to journeyman. Sachs suggests as the name of the new-born: Song of Interpretation of the Blissful Morning-Dream, and the young godmother is requested to speak appropriate words over it. The point of what follows is hardly in Eva's words, pretty as they are; the point is that one of the most extraordinary quintets that ever charmed human ear serves as baptismal send-off to the infant melody.

Each of the five singing together expresses, according to custom in concerted pieces, the aspect which the common subject, or the hour, has for him. And so dear Sachs, while Eva and Walther rejoice on their side, and David and Lene—to whom the apprentice's promotion opens vistas of mastership and marriage,—rejoice on theirs, Sachs, adding a less glad but more serene voice to the glorious sheaf of song, reveals his heart,—with no one to listen, for all are singing. "Full fain"—he sighs, "Full fain had I been to sing before the winsome child, but need was that I should place restraint upon the sweet disorderly motions of the heart. A lovely evening dream it was, hardly dare I to think upon it. . . ." But the wreath of immortal youth shall be the poet's reward. Impertinent to pity the sturdy Sachs, who has his poetry and his strong heart. And he has at all moments been wiser than his lovely evening dream. There has been really no renunciation on his part, for he had never allowed himself any serious parleying with the tender temptation. Not for an instant does he present himself as a

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

sentimental figure; but the generosity with which he employs himself to secure for others the happiness which, though in his good sense he had denied it to himself, his heart had yet caressed in its alluring evening dream, makes him a magnanimous one.

It is time when they have finished to start for the seat of the Saint John's Day celebration. Sachs sends Eva home to her father, orders David to close the shop, and starts along with Walther.

While the curtain is lowered for the change of scene, one of those musical transformations takes place of which there are several instances in these operas. With elements we know, new elements begin to mingle; the old are withdrawn, and presently, musically, as ocularly, the scene is changed. We behold a green meadow on the banks of the Pegnitz; in the distance, the city of Nuremberg. The place is decorated for holiday. There is a great stand for the master-singers and judges in the song-contest. Crowds of holiday-makers are on the spot already, more still arrive by the river in bright boats. The various guilds march in procession with their respective insignia, shoe-makers, tailors, bakers. Apprentices and young girls dance together to a measure daintily gay as their fluttering ribbon-knots. Conspicuous among them is David, so forgetful for the moment of Lene and himself as to imprint a glowing kiss on his partner's cheek. Frivolities stop short with the arrival of the masters. These assemble to the sound of what we will call their unofficial march; then, to their great march, they walk to their places on the stand, Kothner waving the banner of the guild, and the people acclaiming. Pogner escorts Eva to the seat of honour. When all are in their places, a corps of young apprentices, filling the function to-day of heralds, and carrying staffs of office liberally beflowered, call out in Latin the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

order for silence. Quiet being established, Sachs, spokesman for the occasion, rises. At once the silence is shattered by cheers for the popular poet, cries of joy at sight of him; there is waving of kerchiefs and hats. To show how every one knows and loves his songs, the people entone one of them all together and sing it jubilantly through; and "Long live Sachs!" they shout, "Hans Sachs! Long live Nuremberg's beloved Hans Sachs!" It is too much for poet to experience unmoved, and Sachs's voice, when the people quiet down at last, to listen, only gradually regains its manly firmness. "You ease your own hearts and burden mine, in offering me, unworthy, too great honour. If I am not to sink crushed beneath it, let it be in the thought that it is the gift of your love. Great honour already has fallen to my portion to-day, in that I have been elected to the dignity of spokesman. And the announcement which I have to make to you, believe me, is full of high honour!" He imparts to them Pagner's project, but with these important modifications or omissions,—and it is they which constitute the stroke Sachs has been preparing. No mention whatever is made of the limitations determined upon by the masters at the last meeting: that the singers contending must be members of the guild, and that the masters exclusively shall be judges. So the offer stands: A lovely girl and a rich inheritance shall be the portion of the singer who before the assembled people shall carry off the prize,—awarded, one naturally understands, since nothing different is stated, by popular acclamation. Free candidature, therefore popular election! And Sachs so presents the thing that the masters cannot very well object, if even they had the courage to chance the awkwardness of a public scene; they can hardly claim it is not fair that they, presumably superior in song to non-masters, should accept the contest on the same terms. Sachs's peculiar auda-

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

city has lain in his taking the risk of a perfectly justified revolt on the part of the masters against his high-handed proceeding; he has counted on the restraining effect of the public occasion; has counted on luck, which proverbially follows the bold. High-handed, his course, undeniably, but too much was at stake for any narrow consideration to hold back Sachs: the happiness of Eva,—of, as he says, at the conclusion of his announcement, “the amiable stainless one, who must never be made to regret that Nuremberg holds in such honour art and its professors!” Hearty applause follows his words. Pogner grasps his hand, moved, infinitely relieved. “Oh, Sachs, my friend, what thanks do I owe you! How did you know what was weighing on my heart?”—“Much was staked upon that cast,” replies Sachs; “now pluck up heart!”

He catches sight of Beckmesser, who ever since arriving with the rest of the masters has been feverishly studying his bit of music-sheet, at intervals wiping the desperate sweat from his brow. “Mr. Marker, how are you getting on?”—“Oh, this song!” groans the Marker, “I cannot make head or tail of it, and I have worked over it, in all truth, hard enough!” Sachs shows him, if he but knew it, a way of escape. “My friend, you are not obliged to use it.”—“What is the good? My own song, through your fault, is done for. Now be a kind dear fellow, it would be abominable of you to leave me in the lurch.”—“It is my opinion that you had better give it up.”—“Give it up? . . . Well, hardly! I can easily beat all the others, if only you will not sing. I am certain that no one will understand the song, but I am building upon your popularity.”

Sachs abandons him to his fate, and declares the song-contest open. Kothner summons the contestants, “And let the oldest,” he calls, “come first. Master Beckmesser, pray begin. We are late!”

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

The little heralds have piled up grassy sods into a sort of pedestal for the singers to stand on. They lead Beckmesser to this. He stumbles in going, and can hardly from nervousness keep his balance on the none too secure elevation. The common people begin to titter. Murmurs fly from one to the other: "What? That one? That is one of the suitors? Why, he can't even walk! . . . Keep quiet! He is an eminent master! He is the town-clerk. . . . Lord, what a muff! He is toppling over! . . . Be still, and stop your jokes; he has a seat and a voice in the committee! . . ."—" *Silentium! Silentium!*" calls the chorus of little heralds. And Kothner: "Begin!" Beckmesser, after bowing to the queen of the day and to the assembly, gives forth, haltingly, Walther's song as he remembers it, as it has become with passing through the medium of his mind. What he utters, with many an anxious peep at the crumpled manuscript, is nonsense of the most ludicrous. For every word he substitutes another of distantly the same sound, but different meaning, betraying how he has not understood a syllable. The melody, if so were he had mastered it, has completely dropped from his mind, and what he sings to the eccentric words is his own serenade, but perverted by the interference of the alien influence.

The masters at the end of the first verse look at one another, mystified. "What is that? Has he lost his senses? An extraordinary case! Do our ears deceive us?" The people giggle and make remarks, not too loud as yet.

At the end of the second verse, the masters inquire of one another, "What does it mean? Has he gone mad? His song is one piece of nonsense!" while the people giggle louder and make remarks less and less respectful.

At the end of the third verse, populace and masters burst into peals of laughter. Beckmesser descends from his pedestal

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

and hurls himself raging at Sachs. "Accursed cobbler! To you I owe this!—The song is none of mine," he excitedly informs the rest. "Sachs here, whom you honour so, your Sachs gave me the song. The scandalous wretch compelled me to sing it, he foisted off his miserable song on me!" He dashes the sorry-looking manuscript at Sachs's feet, and rushes off like one pursued by a nest of hornets.

Amazement reigns among master-singers and people: "A song of Sachs's? The matter grows more and more astonishing! The song is yours? Be so good, Sachs, as to explain!" Sachs has picked up and smoothed out the crumpled page. "The song, as a matter of truth, is not of my composing. Herr Beckmesser is mistaken, in this respect as in others. How he obtained it let him tell you himself. But never should I be audacious to the point of boasting that so fine a song had been written by me, Hans Sachs."—"What? . . . Fine? . . . That crazy rubbish? Sachs is joking! He says that in fun!"—"I declare to you, gentlemen, that the song is beautiful. But it is obvious at a single glance that Master Beckmesser misrepresents it. I swear to you, however, that you would hear it with delight were one to sing it in this circle correctly as to word and melody. And one who should be able to do this would by that fact sufficiently prove that he is the author of the song, and that in all justice, if he found just judges, he would be called a master. I have been accused and must defend myself. Let me therefore summon a witness. If any one is present who knows that right is on my side, let him come forward as a witness before this assembly."

Quietly and quickly, with his proudly-borne head and his light proud step, Walther advances. A murmur of pleasure runs through the assembly at sight of him, in his resplendent clothes and plumed hat. The good populace on whom Sachs

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

had counted do not disappoint him: the gallant young figure finds instantaneous favour. "A proper witness, handsome and spirited," they comment, "from whom something proper may be expected!" The master-singers are not slow to recognise the intruder of yesterday, and to grasp the situation. They accept it good-humouredly enough, with artistic appreciation, no doubt, of Sachs's well managed *coup de théâtre*. "Ah, Sachs, confess that you are a sly one! But, for this once, have your way!"

"Masters and people are agreed to try the worth of my witness," Sachs announces; "Herr Walther von Stolzing, sing the song. And you, masters, see if he render it aright." He hands them the manuscript.

Walther takes his stand on the flowery mound and starts singing the song we know already. Presently however, the song lifts him away, and he alters, as with that power of inspiration behind him how could he help?—he amplifies, makes more beautiful still. But by that time the masters have become so interested that they withdraw their attention from the manuscript, and follow enthralled the voice of the singer alone.

The song is in its final effect considerably different from the original one, being the fruit of the moment, like Walther's other improvisations. It preserves, however, both in text and tune, a sufficient likeness to the first to prove it of an identical source. It is the same dream he tells, but expressed in different images.

In a blessed love-dream, he had been led to a garden where, beneath a miraculous tree, he had beheld—vision promising fulfilment to love's wildest desire!—a woman of all-surpassing beauty: Eve, in the garden of Paradise. . . .

In a poet's waking dream, he had been lured by the crystal murmur of a spring up a steep path. There, beneath a laurel-tree, he had beheld—and from her hand had received upon his

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

brow water from the sacred fount,—a woman of a beauty grave and sublime: the Muse of Parnassus. . . .

There is no doubt of the impression the song produces upon the audience. As he pauses between the verses, Walther cannot but seize their irrepressible exclamations. "That is a very different matter! Who would have thought it?" The people surrender heart-wholly. "How it soars,—so sweet, so far from earth, and yet it is all as if one had lived through it himself!"—"It is bold and unusual, but well-rhymed and singable!" the masters admit. The circumstances of this hearing are different enough from yesterday's. The infection of Beckmesser's jealous spite is wanting; softening influences are in the lovely scene, the poetic occasion. The pure ecstasy of the song has a chance to work its spell, to transport them outside of their limitations. They are honourable men, as Sachs assured Walther; they have no *parti pris* of bolts and shutters against the New; on occasion they can be generous. "Yes, yes, I see, it is quite another thing," they say, "when it is sung aright!"

Sure of victory, already triumphant, Walther leaps to the goal: "Oh, day most rich in blessing, on which I awake from my dream! The Paradise I saw in sleep lies before me in intensified splendour. The murmuring spring lures me along the way which leads to it,—and the One whose home is there, the elect of my heart, the loveliest of earth, my muse and inspiration, as holy and high as she is fair, I have boldly wooed her,—I have won, by the bright light of day, through the victory of song, both Parnassus and Paradise!"

Before the last note has died, all are clamouring together, awarding to Walther the master-prize. "Reach him the wreath! There is no lover or singer like him!" And then Walther's exquisite morning-dream comes true. He kneels before the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

woman more graciously beautiful than any he had ever seen, while, bending upon him eyes luminous with joy as twin suns, she places upon his head the wreath of laurel and myrtle, the poet's and lover's crown.

Pogner wrings Sachs's hand. "Oh, Sachs, to you I owe happiness and honour!" He draws a sigh of immense well-being. "Lifted is the weight from my heart!"

There are congratulations and rejoicings. In the general glow of good-humour, voices of master-singers call out to Pogner: "Up Master Pogner, and announce to his lordship his admission to the master-guild!" Pogner takes the decoration of the order, the gold chain with the three medallions, and with the words, "I receive you into the master-guild," is casting it over the victorious singer's head, when Walther starts back, as from something of horridly unpleasant association, and makes a gesture of uncompromising refusal. "Not a master, no! . . . I mean to be happy without that title!"

An uncomfortable silence follows upon the hard snub. All look toward Sachs, whose face has clouded over with pain. He walks to Walther, and seizing him by the hand, as one might a child, to bring it to reason, vigorously speaks the defence of the order to which he belongs. "Despise not the masters, but, rather, honour their art. The great good you have this day received speaks loud in their praise. Not to your ancestors, however great, not to your coat of arms, your spear or sword, but to the fact that you are a singer, that you have proved yourself a master, you owe to-day your highest happiness. If then you apply to the question a grateful mind: how can that art be of no account which holds such prizes? That our masters cared for it in their own way, that according to their lights they were faithful to it, that is what has preserved it. Though it no longer is aristocratic, as in the times when it was fostered

MASTER-SINGERS OF NUREMBERG

by princes and courts, yet despite the stress of evil years it has remained German, it has remained sincere. And if it had prospered nowhere but among us, with our burdens and restrictions, you can see in what honour it is held here. What more do you require of the masters? . . . Have a care! Evil contingencies threaten! Should the day come when the German people and kingdom fall asunder, its princes, seduced by false outlandish splendours, would soon no longer understand the language of their own people, and outlandish error, outlandish vanities, would be sown by them in German soil. In that day, should it come, no one would know any longer what is German and genuine, did it not survive by grace of the German masters! Then honour the German masters! By that spell shall you command good genii! And if you second them by your favour, holy Rome may pass away in smoke: we shall still have our holy German art!"

Nobly and contritely Walther bows his head, and Sachs hangs about his neck the collar of the guild. Eva, fired, takes from her lover's fair curls the laurel-wreath, and presses it upon the grisled head of the master. He stands radiant between the two whose happiness is his work. The populace wave their hats and kerchiefs, cheering, "Hail, Sachs! Hans Sachs! Hail Nuremberg's beloved Hans Sachs!"

One cannot help imagining, in "Meistersinger," a fragment of autobiography, a recollection of days when Wagner must have heard on all sides concerning his work what we still occasionally hear, such words as he puts into the mouth of Beckmesser: "*Kein Absatz wo, kein' Coloratur! Von Melodei auch nicht eine Spur!*" No pause anywhere for breath! No appropriate colouring! Of melody not the remotest trace!

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

No pause anywhere for breath! The headlong rush it has of genius. No appropriate colouring! The colouring happens merely to be new. Of melody not the remotest trace,—when in this opera particularly the composer casts melodies up in the air like golden balls and juggles with them; when, like a conjurer, he goes on taking fresh roses in absurd abundance out of a horn that should naturally have been ten times empty!

If we may translate the personages of this delicious play into types, Walther must stand for the poet and singer by God's grace, fresh young Genius, winged bringer of a new message. Beckmesser for Old School, where it has become fossil, where forms moulded on life have become void and dry, and rules are held sufficient without breath of inspiration. Nay, inspiration, which jostles and disturbs rule, is regarded with suspicion. Inspiration to Beckmesser is as much an intruder as would be Saint Francis coming to visit some Prior of his own order long after the spirit animating the saint had been hardened into forms. Hans Sachs, then, is a sort of Ideal Critic, with affection and allegiance toward the past, but with a fair and open mind toward the new. Walther himself could have no more admirable attitude, more perfect temper, toward Art, than Sachs. It is only to be hoped that in his maturity he was as tolerant and broad-minded.

The wise, the gentle Sachs! It is a pity that in listening to an opera one hears so little of the words, for there fall from his genial lips precepts which it would be really worth while to impress upon the memory, among which could there be a more golden than his word to critics: "When you find that you are trying to measure by your own rules that which does not lie within the compass of your rules, the thing to do is to forget your rules and try to discover the rules of that which you wish to measure!"

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

I

THE Overture to *Tristan and Isolde* is singularly calculated to create the mood in which the Opera needs to be heard. It discourses of nothing but love. It is long, it knocks and presses upon chords lying abysmally below thought, until these vibrate in response,—and the curtain goes up before an almost helplessly sympathetic listener.

Chief among the emotions expressed in this harmonious setting-forth of the argument,—rich in sighs, glances, caresses,—is certain tragic yearning, which seems of the very essence of love, the love in question; tragic, because it is a thirst which from the nature of things admits of no satisfaction upon the earth we know, since its demand is no less than fusion of one soul and flesh into another, so that each is completely possessed and neither knows any more which of the two he is; the condition we hear the lovers sigh for later on their bank of flowers in the warm summer night: “I,” says the man, “shall be Isolde, you will be Tristan.”—“I shall be Tristan,” the woman says, “and you Isolde.” Nay, there shall be no more Tristan, no more Isolde, but nameless, indivisible, possessed of a single consciousness, they shall float in an eternal night of love to ever-new recognitions, ever-new ardours. . . .

The story belongs to the period of King Arthur and his Round Table. At that time Cornwall, we learn, was subject

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

to Ireland, to the extent at least of owing tribute. But the subject country, with increase of power, had become impatient of the tax, and, when the Irish hero Morold was sent to collect it, a knight of the Cornish court, Tristan, fought and slew him, and in lieu of the exacted tribute sent back his head to Ireland.

Tristan had not come forth unhurt from the combat in which Morold had fallen. With the peculiar daring which earned him the fame of "hero without equal, wonder of all nations," he took the wound of which he was dying to the country of the enemy, to the very castle of the Irish King whose daughter Isolde's affianced he had slain. For Isolde was renowned for her skill in the art of medicine. The Queen, her mother, possessed even rarer secrets of magic. In a small skiff, almost unattended, Tristan, obscuring his glory under the name of Tantris, came to Isolde to be healed. The high-born physician gave him faithful care. No one suspected him, until Isolde, remarking a trifling notch in his sword, made the discovery that a steel splinter which she had removed from the severed head of Morold fitted it. This man, then, completely in her power, was Tristan, the enemy of her land, the slayer of her betrothed. The duty of a princess of the time was clear. She caught up the sword and approached his bed with the intention of avenging Morold's death. But the wounded man unclosed his eyes, and glancing past the sword, past the hand which brandished it, looked into her eyes. And, inexplicably, she could not proceed; pity moved her, she let the sword sink. She kept the secret of his identity. She applied herself more than ever diligently to heal him, "that he might betake himself home, and burden her no more with the look of his eyes." He went at last with professions of eternal gratitude. The least he could have done, in accordance with these, so it seemed to her, was to preserve silence as she had preserved it, to let the

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

incident have no more result than as if oblivion had engulfed it. Instead of which, behold before long Tristan arriving in his own resplendent person, with an embassy of Cornish nobles, to arrange peace between the two countries and obtain the hand of the Irish king's daughter for the Cornish sovereign, Mark, his uncle.

Now the Irish, being, as we gather, at a disadvantage in any match of force with the insolent tributaries who had cast off their yoke, could not well refuse,—could not afford to give offence by refusing. The alliance was in truth a splendid one,—were it not for that old unavenged affront! Even as matters stood, the proposal admitted of being looked upon in the light of reparation,—if one did not see in it, as did one of the principal personages involved, a second insult more intolerable than the first.

The Cornish suit was successful. The feud was publicly declared at an end, and peace sworn to. The heiress of the Irish crown set sail for Cornwall under the escort of Tristan.

The curtain rising shows the rich pavilion on ship-deck where Isolde hides her face from the light against the cushions of a day-bed. Her attendant, Brangaene, stands gazing over the ship-side. The voice of a young sailor is heard from the rigging out of sight. Now, though the Cornish diplomats have comported themselves during their mission with delicacy, the crew accompanying them take less trouble to conceal the glee they feel over the humiliation of their former lords, signified in this present carrying off of Ireland's proudest jewel. Isolde, spite of all courteous forms, is regarded by them as, in a sense, a prize of war. Some hint of this appears in the song of the young seaman, who permits himself references to the "wild and lovely Irish maid," and asks whether they be her sighs which swell his sail. The words penetrate through Isolde's

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

absorption; she starts up in sudden fury, crying: "Who dares to mock me?" and looks wildly around, as if she had been so engrossed in other scenes that she did not, on returning to the light of day, know for a moment where she was. Then she recognises Brangaene, and remembers, and inquires where they are. "Streaks of blue are rising up out of the West," Brangaene describes what she is watching, "softly and swiftly sails the ship; on a calm sea before evening we surely shall reach the land."—"What land?" Isolde asks unexpectedly. "The verdant coast of Cornwall."—"Nevermore!" bursts from the princess, "Not to-day! Not to-morrow!"

Brangaene hurries to her, alarmed and wondering at the hurricane of passion she now lets loose,—calling upon the arts of magic to restore to her the lost power of commanding sea and storm, calling upon the winds and waves to wreck this insolent ship and drown every one upon it! Brangaene stands aghast. What she had but dimly apprehended, then, was true. She clings to her mistress, endeavouring to calm her. "What, dear heart, have you so long been concealing from me? Not one tear did you shed at parting from father and mother. Hardly a word of farewell did you speak to those remaining behind. Coldly and dumbly you left the land of home; pale and silent you have been on the voyage, taking no food, taking no sleep, deeply troubled, rigid and wretched,—how am I to endure to see you thus, to be nothing to you, to stand before you as a stranger? Oh, tell me what troubles you! Tell me, make known to me what is torturing you! If she is to think herself in any measure dear to you, confide now in Brangaene!" The unhappy Isolde, suffocating, gasps for air: "Air! . . . Air! . . . My heart is smothering! . . . Open! Open wide!" Brangaene hurriedly draws apart the tapestries which form the wall of the apartment at the back. The deck of the ship

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

is seen from mainmast to stern: sailors busy with ropes, groups of knights and their esquires lounging. Tristan stands apart from the rest, with folded arms, staring abstractedly over the water. His servant Kurwenal lies idly outstretched at his feet. Isolde's eyes at once find the half-averted figure; her absorption in it becomes equal to his in the unknown object of the thoughts engrossing him. She does not hear this time the sailor at the topmast singing over again the song she had before resented: "O Irish maid, where tarriest thou? Is it the force of thy sighs which fills my sails?" Slow, involuntary, words drop from her lips, her inmost thoughts speaking to herself, while her eyes brood gloomily upon the unconscious head. "Mine elected,—lost to me! Lofty and beautiful,—brave and craven! Death-devoted head! Death-devoted heart!" Starting awake at the ring of her own words, she laughs unpleasantly and, turning to Brangaene: "What do you think of the lackey yonder?" Brangaene's glance follows Isolde's. She does not understand. "Whom do you mean?"—"The hero over there who averts his glance from mine, who in shame and embarrassment gazes away from me. Tell me, how does he impress you?"—"Are you inquiring, my dear lady," Brangaene asks in wonder, "of Tristan, the marvel of all nations, the man of exalted renown, the hero without equal, honour's treasure and vaunt?" Isolde catches up her tone, to continue in scornful mimicry: "Who terrified at his own achievement flies to refuge wherever he can, having won for his master a corpse to bride? . . . Is my saying dark to you? Go then and ask himself, the presumably free man, whether he dare to venture near me? All forms of reverence and considerate service he forgets toward his sovereign mistress, the shrinking hero, that of all things her glance may not light on him. . . . Oh, he no doubt knows why!" Suddenly overmastered by an im-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

pulse of her too-long controlled rancour: "Go to the haughty one," she orders Brangaene, "bear to him this message from his lady: Let him come into my presence forthwith, prepared to do my command."—"Am I to bid him come and offer his duty?" Brangaene timidly interprets. "Nay," Isolde storms, "let the self-sufficient one be warned to fear the mistress! That do I bid him, I, Isolde!"

Fixedly she watches the attendant moving along the deck, past the sailors at their work, toward the solitary figure of the knight. She watches the two fixedly while their interview lasts.

Kurwenal, catching sight of the woman approaching, tugs at his master's mantle: "Attention, Tristan! Message from Isolde!" Tristan's start suggests how complete his abstraction, and what the effect of that name unexpectedly pronounced. *As Brangaene comes before him*, the stage-directions say, *he rapidly composes himself*. Deferently he inquires of his lady's wishes. Brangaene tells him, barely, that her lady wishes to see him. Then begins the series of his evasions, courteous as possible, but determined as courteous. "If she be weary of the long voyage, that is nigh ended. Before sunset we shall touch land. Whatsoever orders my lady have for me shall be faithfully carried out." Brangaene repeats the order: "Let Sir Tristan then go to her, such is our lady's will."—"Yonder where the green meadows are still coloured blue to the eye, my king awaits my lady. That I may escort her to him, soon will I approach the Bright One. To none would I yield the privilege." The maid repeats, still patiently: "Tristan, my lord, listen and attend: My lady requests your service,—that you should betake yourself to the place where she awaits you."—"At what place soever I be found, faithfully do I serve her, to the greater honour of women. If I should forsake the helm

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

at this moment, how could I safely guide the keel to King Mark's land?" Brangaene's temper flashes a faint reflection of Isolde's fire. "Tristan, my lord, are you mocking me? If the stupid handmaid cannot make her meaning clear to you, hear my mistress's own words. This she bade me say: Be warned, O self-sufficient one, to fear the mistress! That is her behest,—Isolde's!" Without giving Tristan time to hesitate, Kurwenal jumps up: "May I frame an answer?"—"What would your answer be?" Tristan asks, for the moment at a loss. And Kurwenal, very loud, that his words may not fail to reach Isolde's ears: "This say to Madam Isolde: That he who made over to the maid of Ireland the crown of Cornwall and the inheritance of England cannot be the chattel of that same maid, presented by himself to his uncle. A lord of the world,—Tristan, the hero! I cry it aloud and do you report my words, though they should bring upon me the wrath of a thousand Madam Isoldes!" Tristan has vainly tried to silence him. As Brangaene indignantly hastens away, the irrepressible servant sings after her at the top of his voice a mocking fragment of ballad, popular no doubt in Cornwall: "Lord Morold came over the sea to Cornwall to collect tribute. An island floats in a lonely sea, there he now lies buried. His head, however, hangs in Ireland, the tribute paid by England. Hurrah for our lord Tristan! What a one is he to pay tribute!" Tristan drives the fellow off, orders him below. But the whole crew have taken up the last lines of the song and shout them with a will. Brangaene drags together the curtains, shutting from sight the cruel rabble. Isolde, who has with difficulty controlled herself, seems on the point of an outburst, but she quells it, and in the restored silence asks with forced composure: "But now, about Tristan?—I wish to be told exactly." Brangaene, at first unwilling, reports the interview. When she has finished,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Isolde, whose anger has made room for a sorrowful intense dejection, reveals to her what explains the humour, to her so far inexplicable, of her mistress. Her deeply wounded feelings bleeding afresh at their exposure, Isolde makes the relation almost tearfully. "You have been a witness to my humiliation, hear now what brought it about. They sing to me derisive songs. I could reply if I would! Of a boat I could tell which, small and mean, drew to the coast of Ireland. In it a sick and suffering man, in woful plight, at the point of death. . . ." She tells the story of her recognition in this Tantris of Tristan; of her resolve to take immediate vengeance upon him; of the look which disarmed her, her dismissal of him, healed, that he "might go home and burden her no more with the look of his eyes!"—"Oh, wonder!" breathes Brangaene. "Where were my eyes?" The guest whom I once helped to nurse . . . ?"—"You heard his praise a moment ago! 'Hurrah for our lord Tristan!' He was that unhappy man. He swore a thousand oaths of eternal gratitude to me, and truth. Now hear how a hero keeps his word. He whom I dismissed unknown as Tantris, as Tristan comes boldly back. On a proud tall ship he draws to land, and desires the heiress of Ireland in marriage for the worn King of Cornwall, for Mark, his uncle. In Morold's lifetime who had ventured to offer us such an affront? To sue for the crown of Ireland for the King of the tribute-owing Cornish! . . . Oh, woe is me! It was I, I, who in secret prepared for myself this shame! Instead of smiting with the avenging sword, weak, I let it drop. Now I am the servant of my own vassal!" Brangaene, when all is told, does not apparently recognise in the situation cause for so much bitterness. "When peace, reconciliation, and friendship were sworn on all sides," she says wonderingly, "we all rejoiced to see the day. How could I suppose it was a source of affliction to you?" The

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

point then appears of that bitterness, which would hardly in reality have been a point but for a sentiment not among those which Isolde confesses to her confidante. That what she kept silent the other should reveal! That what he could only know and live to report through the weakness of her woman's heart, he should publicly make use of, to his own glory and his relative's advantage! She paints his attitude, as she imagines him, victory-flushed, hale and whole now, pointing at her and saying in loud, clear tones: "There were a treasure for you, my lord and uncle! What do you think of her as a wife? The pretty Irish-woman I will bring to you here. By roads and by-paths well known to me, give the sign, I fly to Ireland: Isolde is yours! I delight in the adventure!" The picture goads her to very madness, and, with a cry for its mingling of ferocity with anguish like the roar of a baited and wounded lioness, he breaks into maledictions upon his head, calling down vengeance upon him, death upon him, nay,—at the climax of her rage and insupportable pain,—death upon them both! With impetuous tenderness Brangaene showers words of endearment on the exhausted friend, hushes her with caresses, heaps, as it were, smothering flowers upon her angry coals. She forces her gently to a seat, comforting her with word and touch. Then she holds up all in a different light, endeavours to make her see the thing reasonably, as it must appear to others. "What delusion is this? What idle raving? How can you stultify yourself till you neither can see nor hear? Whatever debt of gratitude Sir Tristan owes you, tell me, could he better repay it than with the most magnificent of crowns? Thus does he at the same time faithfully serve his noble uncle and bestow upon you the world's most enviable prize. He has renounced, generous and true-hearted, his own inheritance, and placed it at your feet, that he may call you Queen. And if through him you are

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

to wed Mark, how should you find fault with the choice? Can you fail to prize and honour the man? Of great lineage and gentle nature, where is his equal in power and splendour? Who would not wish to share his good fortune, as consort to tarry beside him, whom the greatest of heroes so devotedly serves?" Isolde, but half heeding, has fallen again to her miserable brooding. Brangaene's last words find their way to her brain and produce an image there which she stares at with gloomy and tragic eyes. As before, unconscious in her perturbation that she is doing it, she voices her inmost thoughts audibly, like a somnambulist: "Unloved by him, to behold the unrivalled man ever near, how could I endure the torment?" Brangaene catches the words, and innocently supposes them applied to King Mark. She presses fondly against this unaccountably humble-minded mistress: "What are you dreaming, perverse one? Unloved? Where does the man live who would not love you? Who could see Isolde and not blissfully dissolve in love for her? But, if so were that he who has been chosen for you should be of a nature to that degree cold, if so were that some evil magic drew him away from you, I should know how very soon to bind the unkind one to you, the power of love should work its spell upon him. . . ." She draws so near to Isolde that she can speak without fear of being overheard. "Do you forget your mother's magic? Do you imagine that she, who ponders all things so sagely, has sent me void of counsel along with you to a strange land?"—"At the right moment I am reminded of my mother's counsel," Isolde murmurs thoughtfully before her; "Her art I prize and welcome its aid. Vengeance it affords for the betrayal, peace in the need of the heart. Bring the casket here to me."—"It contains what shall secure your happiness!" Brangaene joyfully hurries to fetch the small golden coffer, lifts the lid, fingers

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

the phials. "In this very order were they placed by your mother, the mighty magic potions. For hurts and wounds here is balm; here, for poison, is counterpoison. . . ." She takes out and holds up before Isolde with a significant smile a small flask. "The sweetest draught of all I hold here!" Isolde pushes aside her hand and stretches her own to the casket. "You are mistaken. I know better which one that is. I marked it with a deep incision. Here is the draught which shall serve my turn!" Brangaene stares at the phial which Isolde has taken from among the rest. "The death-potion!" she gasps, recoiling.

A sing-song shout interrupts them, the voices of the sailors hauling at ropes, taking in sail,—a reminder to Isolde that the land, the terrible land, is near. Kurwenal hurries in: "Up, up, you ladies! Briskly and cheerily! Quickly prepare to land! Ready at once, nimble and spry! And to Madam Isolde I was to say from Tristan, my master: the pennant of joy waves merrily from the mast, making her approach known in Mark's royal castle. Wherefore he begs Madam Isolde to haste and make ready, that he may escort her ashore." Isolde, for a minute convulsed with a shuddering horror at her realization of the decisive moment so near, reconquers her composure, and replies with contrasting dignity and calm to Kurwenal's familiar and rude pressing of the high-born ladies to haste. "To Sir Tristan bear my greetings and report to him what I say. If he look to have me walk at his side and stand before King Mark, as custom and seemliness demand, let him know that this shall in no wise happen if he have not before sought pardon of me for an uncondoned offence. Let him therefore cast himself upon my clemency!" As Kurwenal by a gesture signifies his stiff-necked resistance to her command, she repeats it, more regally peremptory than before: "Take careful heed

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

of what I say and carefully report it. I refuse to make ready to accompany him to land, I refuse to walk beside him and stand before King Mark, unless he have before, as is fit and becoming, sued for forgiveness and forgetfulness of an unexpiated fault. Let him hope these from my grace!"—"Be quite sure that I shall tell him!" the bluff serving-man replies, turning to go: "Now wait and see how he takes it!"

Isolde flings her arms around Brangaene: "Farewell, Brangaene! Commend me to the world! Commend me to my father and mother!"—"What is it?" the handmaid asks, not understanding, yet half frightened; "What are you meditating? Are you planning flight? Whither must I follow you?"—"Nay, did you not hear? I shall remain where I am. I intend to await Tristan. Follow faithfully my command. At once prepare the peace-draught,—you know the one I showed you."—"What draught do you mean?" Brangaene asks, not daring to understand. Isolde takes it out of the coffer once more and holds it up for Brangaene to see well, the little deadly phial. "This draught! Pour it into the golden goblet; it will contain the whole without brimming over.—Mind you are true to me!" she adds, forcing it into the maid's hand. "But this drink . . ." falters the appalled girl, "for whom?"—"For him who betrayed me!"—"Tristan?"—"Shall drink to our peace-making!" Brangaene falls at Isolde's feet, entreating her to spare her. "Do you spare me, disloyal girl!" Isolde passionately chides. What was the purpose, she asks, of that provision made by her mother for their assistance in a strange land? For hurts and wounds she had given balm; for poison, antidote; for deepest woe, for utmost affliction, she had given the death-draught: thanks be rendered to her now—by death! Brangaene still resisting, Isolde imperiously presses her command. Their struggle is cut short by

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

Kurwenal announcing Tristan. Brangaene staggers to the back. Isolde visibly summons up all her courage, all her strength, and with queenly self-possession bids Tristan approach.

The music introducing the following scene has the effect of lifting the story on to a plane of larger things. The proportions of the personages, in the light of the magnifying music, are seen to be heroic, their natures vast, their passions, in their very tremendousness, august.

Tristan stops at the entrance and waits deferentially. Constraint makes him into a man of chill iron. There is a long moment of heavy-laden silence. He is first to speak: "Make known to me, lady, your wish!" She comes to the point at once. "Do you not know my wish, when the dread of fulfilling it has kept you afar from my glance?" He evades her, as he had before evaded Brangaene. "Reverence laid its compulsion upon me!"—"Small reverence have you shown me. With overt scorn you have refused obedience to my command."—"Obedience alone restrained me."—"Paltry cause should I have to thank your master, if his service required of you discourtesy to his own consort."—"Custom demands," he quietly meets this, "where I have lived, that the escort of the bride, while bringing her home, should keep afar from her presence."—"For what reason?"—Stiffly as he stands, his answer resembles a shrug. "Ask of custom!"—"Since you cherish so great a regard for custom, my lord Tristan," Isolde mocks, "let me remind you of what likewise is a custom: to make peace with the enemy, if he is to report you as his friend." "And what enemy?" he questions, unmoved. "Inquire of your terror! . . . Blood-guiltiness stands between us!"—"That was made good!"—"Not between us!"—"In the open field, before the assembled people, a solemn oath was sworn to let vengeance rest."—"Not

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

there was it, not in the open field, that I kept Tantris concealed, that Tristan lay at my mercy. In the open field he stood magnificent, hale and brave; the thing however which he swore, I forebore to swear. I had learned to keep silence. When he lay languishing in the hushed chamber, and I stood silent before him with the sword, though my mouth no made sound, though my hand refrained, yet the thing which I had sworn with hand and mouth I silently renewed my oath to perform. I now intend to keep it.”—“What did you swear, lady?” Tristan asks simply, without effect of defiance. “Vengeance for Morold!” she hurls at him. He seems to wonder. A sort of numbness has been creeping over him; an atmosphere of dream has closed around him; her neighbourhood, her voice, no matter what words she is saying, even these angry and cruel ones, have an effect of lulling, of making the real world seem unreal. “Are you concerned for that?” he asks, with the sincerity of that state of having lost grasp on things as it is agreed to pretend they are. “Dare you to mock me?” she rages, “He was affianced to me, the gallant Irish hero. I had consecrated his arms, for me he went into battle. When he fell, my honour fell with him. In the heaviness of my heart I swore an oath that if no man would take vengeance for his murder, I, a woman, would find the hardihood for it. Why, when sick and feeble you lay in my power, I did not strike, explain to yourself by easy interpretation: I cared for your wound, that a man in sound health should be struck down by the vengeful hand of him who won Isolde. Judge for yourself now what your doom shall be. Since the men are all your adherents, who is to smite Tristan?” More than ever it seems like the atmosphere of a dream closing down upon him, a dream in which they move, projecting incredible things. But he has perfectly seized her meaning, and even in a dream a

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

man acts in character. Pale and self-contained, he hands her his unsheathed sword, and his voice shows a first tinge of emotion as he speaks the name of Morold, whom, it would almost seem, she had loved. "If Morold was so dear to you, again take up the sword, and drive it surely and steadfastly, that it may not drop from your grasp!"

If she seemed somewhat like a lioness before, striding and chafing in her regal rage, she is again, it must be confessed, a little like one now, but presenting a different aspect of the great feline, a sort of cruelty, a need to torment before sacrificing. "What would King Mark say if I were to slay his best servant, the most faithful of his retainers, who won for him crown and land? Does it seem to you such a paltry matter, that for which he stands indebted to you, bringing home to him the Irish bride, that he would not chide, should I slay the envoy who so faithfully delivers into his hands the hostage of the peace-compact? . . . Put up your sword! When upon a time I brandished it, my heart hot with desire for vengeance, at your gazing upon me with an eye that took my measure, to see if I would answer as a wife for King Mark"—(There, there is point of insufferable bitterness!)"—"I let the sword sink. Let us drink now to our reconciliation!"

By a sign she orders Brangaene to bring the draught. The poor creature shrinks away shuddering. Isolde, by a gesture more peremptory still, repeats her command, and Brangaene is seen tremulously busying herself with the golden casket and the golden cup. Again the sing-song chorus is heard, of the sailors hauling in the topsail. The sound falls with a shock upon Tristan's ear. "Where are we?" he cries, in bewilderment. "Close to our destination!" Isolde replies significantly. They are so close indeed to the end of their voyage that anything there is to say must be said now, and she invites, with a

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

first suspicion of softness, some expression from him of regret, some explanation before they die, some attempt at justification of his so unkind-seeming return to the woman who had nursed and saved him. "Tristan, shall I obtain amends? What have you to say to me?" But he is guarded now as earlier; the compulsion of honour is no less strong upon him than before. "The lady of silence," he replies darkly, "teaches me to be silent. I apprehend, mayhap, what she concealed. . . . I conceal what she does not apprehend!"—"I shall apprehend the reason of your silence," she exclaims angrily, "if you mean to elude me. Do you refuse to drink to our peace-making?"

Brangeane has brought the cup. Tristan gazes rigidly into Isolde's eyes as she approaches him bearing it. "The voyage nears its end. In brief space we shall stand," her lip curls with irony, "before King Mark! As you lead me to him, should you not deem it an apt speech to make: My lord and uncle, look at her well! A meeker woman you could never hope to win. I slew her affianced, I sent home to her his head; the wound made by his weapon she graciously healed. My life lay in her power; the gentle maid made me a gift of it, and gave her consent to the dishonour and degradation of her country that she might become your wife. In kind acknowledgment of my good gifts to her, she mixed me a sweet peace-draught; of her grace she tendered this to me, to make all offences forgotten!" No, Tristan can hardly entertain a doubt of the cup's contents which the princess holds toward him with her ambiguous smile. But her right, aside from any other consideration, is recognised as indubitable to the life which she saved. We have from his own lips later what his emotions were in this moment so pregnant with fate. What we see is that he stands like a man in a dream. A voice is heard outside shouting orders to the sailors: "Up with the cable! Free

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

the anchor!" He starts awake—he rises as if with a spring to the height of the moment. "Anchor loose!" he cries wildly. "Helm to the stream! Sails and mast to the wind!" Ay, let go all regards and restraints of life, since life itself is about to be tossed over. There is zest in doing it, and then rid at once forever of the puzzling world of duty and prudence and heart-starvation! He snatches the goblet from Isolde's hand: "Well do I know Ireland's queen and the magic power of her arts. I made use of the balm which she proffered, I take the cup from her now, that I to-day may completely recover. And do you mark the pledge with which, grateful, I drink to our peace!" It is an answer, this enigmatic pledge, to her wistful question: "What have you to say to me?" He cannot pass into silence, and leave her forever with her unmingled contempt for him. By broken intimations he flashes light upon the thing which his lips are interdicted from revealing. Charged with emotion, the words chime slowly: "Tristan's honour,—highest truth! . . . Tristan's misery,—cruellest spite! . . . Lure of the heart! . . . Dream-intuitions! . . . Sole comforter of an eternal woe, merciful draught of forgetfulness, unwaveringly I drink!" He sets the cup to his lips and is drinking as he said, when with the cry: "Defrauded here too! Mine, one half!" Isolde wrests the goblet from him: "Traitor, I drink to you!" and drains it, unwavering as he.

The empty cup drops from her hand. They stand in suspense, gazing at each other, as defiantly they await death. The searching potion in a moment begins to take effect; each sees in the eyes of the other a new thing dawning, strange and beautiful; a trembling seizes upon their limbs. They press their hands convulsively to their hearts, the seat of an incomprehensible trouble, then to their foreheads, within which the brain seems to have become subject to over-wild delusions.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Their eyes meet again, and are averted in a confused terror; but, invincibly allured, again seek the other—and both gaze with increasing, at last unconquerable, yearning. With tremulous lips she speaks his name,—a complete confession in the one word so spoken. Passionately he calls hers,—confession for confession. She sinks overpowered on his breast. He clasps her ardently to him. Brangaene wrings her hands at sight of them locked in their long, mute embrace. Her work this, the work of her disobedient hands which, too weak for the stern task assigned them, poured out the love-potion in place of the death-draught. “Woe, woe,” she wails, “eternal, irredeemable woe, instead of brief death! Behold the pernicious work of a foolish fondness blossoming heavenward in lamentation!”

The two move apart for a moment in order better to gaze at each other. “What was I dreaming,” he falters, “of Tristan’s honour?” “What was I dreaming,” she wonderingly asks, “of indignities to Isolde?”—“You, lost to me?” Could man have imagined so wild a thing! “You repulsing me?” Probable, it seems, as he stretches to her those yearning arms! It has all been a malignant trick, then, of evil sorcery! Restored at length from that delusion, they yield themselves exultantly to the tide of passion that has caught them away and shall carry them whither it will, scornful of the whole world, lost in each other, conscious of a sweetness in the surrender surpassing all that life had given them to suspect.

The peculiar action of the potion is detected from the above. It seems less to create passion than to remove all that obscured and controlled it, dissolve the barriers which up to the moment of drinking stood so effectively between the two. Tristan’s will crumbles under it, the will which had kept him loyal to Mark, which had made him, to the point of offence, shun the

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

radius of her dangerous magnetism. Isolde's pride melts under it, which had enabled her to keep up with herself and him a fiction of hate for the man who had wronged her. All that keeps love within bounds being burned away, it towers in a sublime conflagration. Their sense of the change is that they have awakened from a dream; but the effect of the potion has been in truth rather more to plunge them into a state of dream, in which while one emotion is in the ascendant the others sleep,—reason sleeps, will sleeps, all other interests and considerations sleep, leaving love free to reach proportions and an intensity unknown during wakefulness.

They have not heard or heeded the cries of the crew: "Hail, hail, King Mark!" The curtains of the pavilion are suddenly drawn wide apart. The ship's company crowds the deck; all are gazing toward the land. Tristan and Isolde take account of nothing, their senses fast sealed to all but the contemplation of each other. Brangaene and other women place on Isolde's unconscious shoulders the royal mantle, and deck her, unaware of it, with jewels. Kurwenal comes running to his master: "Hail, Tristan, fortunate hero! King Mark, with rich rout of courtiers, approaches in a barge. Ha! He looks well pleased, coming to meet the bride!" Tristan asks, dazed: "Who approaches?"—"The King!"—"What king?"—Kurwenal points overboard. Tristan stares landward, not comprehending. The men shout and wave their caps. "Hail, King Mark!"—"What is it?" Isolde inquires, reached in her trance by the clamour; "Brangaene, what cry is that?"—"Isolde, mistress," the distraught Brangaene implores, "self-control for this one day!"—"Where am I?" the bewildered lady asks helplessly. "Am I alive? . . ." What, the question asks itself, what is this still familiar surrounding scene, when they ought, by true working of the drug, to be dead? If any

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

thought had accompanied the overmastering impulse which she had blindly followed, it had been that before death all disguises drop, that in dying one is sincere. But since death had not followed the drinking of the draught—"Ha! What draught was that?" she asks in consternation. Brangaene gives the desperate truth. "The love-draught!" Isolde's eyes widen with horror, and turning from Brangaene fix themselves upon Tristan. The situation flashes before her for one shocked moment in its true colours; and as before her calling his name had revealed all love, it reveals now her sense of an unspeakable awfulness in what has happened to them. As he calls her name, too, it expresses, with his boundless tenderness, pity and a tragic recognition of the black ingredient in the cup which had lifted them to such heights of intoxication. "Must I live?" speaks the last glimmer of the old Isolde, provided normally with a moral nature; and overwhelmed by the greatness of the catastrophe she sinks fainting upon his breast. A last glimmer of the old Tristan groans aloud: "O rapture beset with snares! Bliss on betrayal built!"

Trumpets are heard. The eager expectancy of all indicates that the King's barge is close at hand. The curtain falls.

II

The introduction to the second act opens with the motif of the Day. It is no tender dawn described, with tremulous lights among the clouds; it has little of the touching *Morgenpracht* in Parsifal. It is a startling announcement of a fateful fact, an obtruder feared and unloved; it is like a clash of cymbals or call of trumpets summoning to unwelcome tasks, away from delights and dreams. It is indeed the day as it appears to lovers when, dispelling the gentle night which united them,

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

with cruel golden shafts it drives them apart. The musical rendering follows upon it of love's impatient heart-beats, love's ungovernable eagerness for the beloved's presence, love listening for the footsteps of the beloved. The curtain rises upon a garden under a cloudless summer night. Beside the door of Isolde's apartment a torch is burning. The sound is heard of hunting-horns gradually retreating. Brangaene stands on the castle-steps, listening to these. Isolde, all in a happy agitation, hurries forth to ask if they still be audible. She herself cannot hear them any more. But to Brangaene's ear the sound is still distinct. Isolde listens again: No! Brangaene, she believes, is deceived by her over-great anxiety, deceived by the rustling of the leaves. "You," Brangaene retorts, "are deceived by the impetuosity of your desire! I hear the sound of the horns." Isolde again listens. "No!" she discourses in her over-running tender exhilaration, "the sound of horns was never so pleasing as that! It is the soft purling of the fountain whose music comes so sweetly borne to us; how could I hear it, if hunting-horns were still blaring near by? In the silence, all I hear is the murmured laughter of the fountain. The one who is waiting for me in the hushed night, are you determined to keep him away from me as if horns were still close at hand?"—"The one who is waiting for you—do but listen to my warning," Brangaene pleads, "there are spies in the night lying in wait for him! Because you are blind, do you believe the eyes of the world dulled to your actions and his?" Against Melot she warns her, Melot, who, when he came aboard the ship with King Mark to receive the bride,—and the kindly King was engrossed by anxiety for the condition of the pale and fainting princess,—with treacherous, suspicious eye, Brangaene had seen it, scrutinised the countenance of Tristan, to read in it what might thereafter serve his purpose. Often

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

since then she has come upon him eavesdropping. Against Melot let Isolde be warned! . . . Melot? Isolde rejects the idea with light scorn. Is not he Tristan's dearest friend? When Tristan is forced to keep afar from her, with whom does he spend the time but Sir Melot? "The thing which makes him suspicious to me, to you endears him!" cries Brangaene, in despair at such wilful blindness. "From Tristan to Mark lies Melot's road. He there sows evil seed. This nocturnal hunting-party, so hurriedly concerted, has in view a nobler quarry than your fancy deems!"—"Melot," Isolde persists in his defence, "invented the stratagem, out of compassion for his friend. And do you make it into a reproach to him? He cares for me better than do you. He opens to me that which you close. Oh, spare me the misery of hesitation! The signal, Brangaene, give the signal! Extinguish the light to its last flicker. Beckon to the Night, that she may completely bend over us. Already she has poured her silence upon grove and house. Already she has filled the heart with her happy trepidation. Quench the light! Smother its frightening glare! Throw open the way to my beloved!"—"Oh, let the torch of warning stand!" Brangaene struggles with her still, "Let it stand to illumine your danger!" And she wrings her hands anew, lamenting over this which is the work of those unfaithful hands, in a single instance disobedient to the mistress's will. "Your work?" Isolde smiles, with that mortal lightness which is upon her to-night; "Oh, foolish girl! Do you not know the Lady of Love? Do you not know her power, her miracles? Queen of high hearts, ruler of earth's destinies, life and death are subject to her. She weaves them out of pain and pleasure. She can change hate into love. Presumptuous, I took in hand the work of death. The Lady of Love wrested it from me. The death-devoted she took into her keeping, she seized the

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

work in her own hands. To whatever purpose she will to turn it, however she will to end it, whatever the doom she appoint me, I am become her own. Let me then show myself obedient to her!" Clearly, Isolde to-night is *fey*. A rapturous madness is upon her. Aphrodite, the Lady of Love, possesses her indeed, and no impression is to be made upon her great mood by anything Brangaene can say. The girl might talk more hopefully to a gust of summer wind. Poor-spirited and grey-hued she appears, with her anguish and forebodings, beside the glowing, rosily-smiling queen, in her secure expectation. Still she presses the prayer of her terror: Just this one night let Isolde listen to her pleading! Just this one night let her not put out the light! But the mad Queen declares bafflingly that *Frau Minne*, Madam Love, desires that it shall become night, that she herself may illumine the place whence Brangaene's torch banishes her. To the watch-turret with Brangaene, whence let her keep faithful look-out. "The torch," Isolde cries, grasping it, "were it the light of my life, laughing, without a tremor, I would put it out!" She dashes it to the ground, where it slowly dies. The troubled Brangaene disappears with heavy step up the stairway to the battlements.

Then is heard the motif again of love's impatience, of love listening. Isolde peers down the avenue of trees, strains her ear for the sound of footsteps. She waves her veil, which glimmers white in the darkness; she waves it, in her impatience, more and more quickly. She has caught sight of him, as an ecstatic gesture betrays. She hurries to the top of the stairs, the better to see him from afar and wave welcome to him. She rushes at last to meet him and they are gathered in each other's arms. So over-great is their joy that neither can believe the witness of his senses; nothing so good could be true as that this verily which can be seen and clasped should be the so

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

sorely desired one. They vent themselves in such childish, fond, incredulous exclamations as: Is it you yourself? Are they your eyes? Are they your lips? Have I here your hand? Have I here your heart? Is it I? Is it you? Do I hold you close? Is it no fancy? Is it no dream? And, as if finally convinced, they burst forth in a hymn of thanksgiving and joy.

"The light! The light! Oh, that light!" the lover voices his grudge against it. "How long ere it went out! The sun sank, day departed, but the ill-will of the Day was still unsated. It lit a fearful danger-signal and fastened it at the beloved's door, to prevent me coming to her!"—"But the hand of the beloved extinguished the light," Isolde pacifies him; "What the handmaid refused, I feared not to do. At the command and under the protection of Great Love, I cried defiance to the Day!"—"The Day! The Day! the malignant Day!" he inveighs; "To that implacable enemy hate and reproach! Oh, might I, even as you quenched the light, put out the torches of the insolent Day, in vengeance for all the sufferings of love!"

There is a great deal in the often fanciful, yet ever earnest, conversation between the lovers, about the Day and the Night; the Day being devoted to their hate, the Night to their worship. It is not only, however, that the day divides them, and their trysts belong to the night. They make the image of Day to stand for falsehood and evil illusion, while Night represents truth. The reason of this is not far to seek. Their love is not like the love of other mortals. Inevitably in the latter many elements enter. Will controls it, at least to some extent; reason guides and bounds it; sense of humour even qualifies it. A thousand things besides love find room in the most enamoured human heart and brain: other persons, pur-

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

suits, interests,—what Rossetti calls “all life’s confederate pleas, work, contest, fame.” The many-sided nature of man is appealed to by myriad things. Only for brief moments do lovers stand on the high peaks of pure passion where Tristan and Isolde perpetually reside. Love they never so truly, lovers who have not quaffed the magic potion love great part of the time almost unconsciously, in a divine under-current,—no otherwise indeed than Tristan before the potion, when, despite the Image in his heart, he devoted thought to his career, cherished dreams of ambition. But after the cup Tristan and Isolde are lovers, nothing more,—or less. All the furniture of the day which has nothing to do with their love is therefore an impertinence, an obtrusion; all day’s pageants and activities are a vanity, and a pernicious vanity; a glaring mask hiding from sight the only true and beautiful. Everything that the garish daylight shows, which can never show them the depths of the other’s heart, is a false show, an ugly delusion. The night, during which all the troublesome, battering appeals of the day are suspended, in which everything fades from the eye, leaving it free to fix itself upon the only reality, love,—the night is fosterer and patroness of truth. To love the night, to yearn for it, to wish it forever prolonged, is natural in these lovers who have drank of the cup; and, by a natural step further, since earthly life affords no such night, to wish for the night of death, as we hear them presently doing, a night in which they picture themselves eternally floating in a state of ever-renewed joy in each other, ever fresh ardour, two and yet one. It is not in the least like Paradise. Paradise, with its interfering light and shows and other-souls-in-bliss, could be to them but another version of the Day. The Paradise of their desire is an eternal twilight, and nothing more asked for each than the heaven of the other.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Meanwhile they are talking together like commoner lovers, of the past, of their first meeting, the beginnings of their love. How, she asks him, very humanly, how could he do to her the thing he did, betray her as he had done, claim her for another, give her over to death? "It was the Day!" he explains. "The Day, shining about me, which showed Isolde, where she stood sun-like, in the splendour of glory and greatness, infinitely far removed. That which so ravished my eye, weighted down my heart to the earth. How, in the brilliant light of the Day, how could Isolde be mine?"—"Was she not yours, whose elect you were? What falsehoods did the evil Day tell you, that you should betray the faithful one, who had preferred you?" The love of glory it had been, he avows, which moved him. That sun of the Day, worldly honour, with its idle and false rays had allured him. An Image all the while lay in the deepest shrine of his heart, an unsleeping Image which had impressed itself while he was hardly aware, and lived in the chaste night there, closely shut in. Till a ray of the Day had penetrated even so deep, and that which was so secret and sacred that his eyes scarcely trusted themselves to look at it, that Image, smitten by Daylight, lay brilliantly revealed. And, Day-deluded, he had vaunted before the whole army that which seemed to him so desirable and beautiful, the fairest King's-bride of all the earth; and to silence the envy and hatred which had begun to make his honours heavy to him, to maintain his glory, he had undertaken that boldest exploit, his quest to Ireland. "Vain slave of the Day!" Isolde calls him. She tells her part of the story, and we are enlightened concerning the mood in which she proffered to him the death-draught: how, deceived she too by the Day, tortured in her love for him, she had, while ardently loving him, hated him to the bottom of her heart. From the light of Day, which showed him an ingrate and a traitor, she had

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

longed to flee, to draw him along with her into the night, where her heart foretold an end of the mistake, a dispelling of the apprehended delusion; to drink to him eternal love and enter death simultaneously with him.

We learn thereupon the mood in which he accepted the cup from her. "When I recognised the sweet draught proffered by your hand, when intuition clearly and surely told me what it was the peace-drink promised me, there dawned in my bosom, mild and divine, the Night—my Day had reached its close!" In other words, when he had stood facing, as he knew, death, all the vain shows and disguises of the Day had melted away, he had seen for the first time clearly in his own heart. "O hail to the draught!" he exclaims, "Hail to its sublime magic! At the portal of death, where I quaffed it, it opened wide to me the region where I theretofore had wandered but in dream, the wonder-kingdom of the Night! From the Face in the innermost shrine of the heart it dispelled the deceiving glare of the Day, that my eyes, grown accustomed to the Night, might see it in its truth." But the Day, she carries on the conceit with gathering sadness, had its revenge! The Day entered into league with his sins, and that Face which the Night had vouchsafed him to see he had been forced to surrender to the royal power of the Day, and behold it shining lonesomely afar, in barren magnificence. "How have I endured it?" she moans, "How do I still endure it?" Nay, he comforts her, "We are now become the initiate of the Night. The malevolent Day, the cruel, can divide, but no longer deceive us. They whose eyes the Night has consecrated laugh to scorn Day's idle splendour, his braggart brilliancy. The fugitive flashes of his lightning cannot dazzle them more. He who has gazed longingly into the night of death, he to whom that Night has confided her deep secret, the lies of the Day, honour and glory, power and

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

gain, lovely and shining though they be, like idle star-dust he sees them float past. Amid the vain delusions of the Day he is possessed by a single longing, the longing for the holy Night, in which the one thing from all eternity true, Love with its rapture, awaits him!" He draws her gently to a flowery bank, sinks kneeling before her and lays his head within her arm. And they breathe forth together, with an equal dreamy devoutness, their invocation to the Night. "Oh, close around us, night of love! Give forgetfulness of life! Gather us up in your arms, release us from the world! . . ." Quenched is the last torch, quenched all thought, all memory. In a sacred twilight full of wondrous divinations, the dread illusions of the world melt away, leaving free the spirit. And the sun in the breast having set, softly shine forth the stars of joy. And when, heart upon heart, lip against lip, breathing one breath, the lovers' eyes are blinded with joy, the world with its dazzling deceits fades from sight, the world which the Day had flashed before their eyes for their delusion, and they themselves are the world, and the world is life, is love, is joy, is a beautiful wish come true, from which there shall be no awakening. . . .

Reaching completely the state they describe, of forgetfulness of the world and the Day, each the whole world to the other, they sink back side by side, cheek to cheek, among the flowers.

From the turret comes the lonely voice of Brangaene, warning the lovers to have a care, have a care, the night is nearly over! There is a leisurely moment. Isolde stirs: "Hark, beloved!" But Tristan, too deeply steeped in the languor of night and dreams, replies with a sigh: "Let me die!" Isolde raises herself a little: "Oh, envious sentinel!" Tristan remains reclining: "Never to waken!"—"But the Day must rouse Tristan?" she softly exhorts. "Let the Day yield unto

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

death!" She considers this quietly: "Day and death then with a simultaneous stroke shall overtake our love?" He comes a little more awake to protest that death cannot destroy such love as theirs, that love is stronger than death, is eternally living, that all that could die in death would be the disturbing things which now prevent him from being always with her, whereas were they to die,—inseparable,—to all eternity one,—nevermore to awake,—nevermore to know fear,—nameless, close enfolded in love,—belonging singly to themselves,—they should live wholly for love! . . . She says the words after him, dreamily, charmed, allured by the vista they open before her. And when Brangaene's voice is heard again from her turret warning them to have a care, have a care, day is at hand, and Tristan bends over her smiling to ask: "Shall I heed?" she sighs, as he had done before: "Let me die!"—"Shall I awake?" he very gently teases. "Never to wake again!"—"Must the Day rouse Tristan?"—"Let the Day yield unto death!"—"We will brave then the threats of the Day?" With increasing earnestness she cries: "To be rid of his malice forever!"—"Day-break shall never more frighten us apart?"—"Eternal shall be our night!"

This is really but a lovers' device for clinging together a little longer; one does not feel that they have seriously determined to remain where they are till they shall have been discovered and sacrificed on the altar of a husband's honour. They plainly are in the state they have described: quenched is thought, is memory; they are intoxicated with the *Liebeswonne* they celebrate, and so while day is whitening overhead, feeling really, as far as they are capable of thought, besottedly secure,—Frau Minne will protect!—they caress, clasped in each other's arms, the thought of the eternal night lying beyond the death they would die for love, where far from the sun,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

far from the lamentation of Day-decreed partings, delivered from fear, delivered from all ill, they shall dream, in exquisite soltitude and in unbounded space, a super-adorable dream. He shall be Isolde, she Tristan,—but no, there shall be no more Tristan, no more Isolde, but undivided, inexpressible, they shall move to ever-new recognitions, new ardours, possessed in everlasting of a single consciousness—Ineffable joy of love! Their voices soar with these flights of fancy. . . . Of a sudden, as if with a crash, the sweet harmonies turn to discord. A shriek is heard from Brangaene. Kurwenal rushes in with drawn sword, crying: “Save yourself, Tristan!”

Hard upon his heels come Mark, Melot, and a flock of courtiers in hunting-attire. They stop in consternation before the lovers, who have seen nothing, heard nothing, and stand quietly lost in each other’s embrace. It is only when Brangaene seizes her that Isolde becomes aware of the spectators. With a natural impulse of womanly shame she averts her face from all those eyes and hides it against the flowery bank. Tristan with one arm holds his mantle wideoutspread so that it screens her from sight, and for long moments continues so, motionless, gazing rigidly at the motionless men who return his gaze in silence. In the pale first glimmer of dawn, he might well think them unreal, creations of a bad dream. The spell of silence is broken by the cry bursting from his lips: “The desolate Day—for the last time!” Melot steps forward and points at him: “You shall now tell me,” he speaks to Mark, “whether I rightfully accused him? Whether I am to retain my head which I placed at stake? I have shown him to you in the very act. I have faithfully preserved your name and honour from stain.”

The King is deeply shaken. No anger is in his unsteady voice, but utter sorrow. Something deeper has been reached

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

than his pride in his honour, and that is not his love for Isolde, but his faith in Tristan. "Have you really?" he bitterly takes up Melot's last assurance and his boast of fidelity. "Do you imagine it? Behold him there, the most loyal among the loyal! Look upon him, the friendliest of friends! The most generous act of his devotion he has used to stab my heart with deadliest perfidy. If Tristan then has betrayed me, am I to hope that my honour, which his treason has struck at, has been loyally defended by Melot?"

These are strange words for Tristan the knight to hear. Applied to himself, such words as perfidy, treason. . . . He brushes his arm wildly across his eyes: "Phantoms of the Day! Morning-dreams! empty and lying,—vanish, disperse!" The heart-broken King, with a gentleness more effectual in punishing than the angriest objurgations, goes on to sear the false friend's conscience by holding up before him, simply, what he has done; comparing the image of him as he has in fact proved with the image of him which Mark had cherished. The reproach is intolerable in view of what Mark himself is: noble, gentle, great-hearted, and toward Tristan so full of affection! "To me—this? This, Tristan, to me? Where now shall one look for truth, since Tristan has deceived me? Where look for honour and uprightness, since the pattern of all honour, Tristan, has lost them? Whither has virtue fled, since she is gone from Tristan, who had made her into his shield and defence, yet has now betrayed me?"

Tristan's eyes, which had been fixed steadily upon Mark, slowly sink to the ground; a wondering sadness overspreads his countenance, heavier and heavier as the royal master proceeds with his arraignment. Why Tristan's innumerable services, the greatness he had won for his King, if they were to be paid with the receiver's dishonour? Was it too small a reward

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

that the King had made him his heir? So dearly he had loved him that, having lost his wife, and being childless, he had resolved for his sake not to wed again. He had been obdurate to the prayers of his people, to Tristan's own entreaties, until Tristan had threatened to leave the kingdom unless he were himself despatched to bring home a bride for the King. And his courage had won for Mark this woman, lovely to a wonder, whom who could know, who behold, who proudly call his own, without accounting himself blessed? This one, to whom he, Mark, would never have presumed to aspire, Tristan, braving enemies and danger, had brought home to him. And now that through such a possession his heart had become more vulnerable to pain than before, wherefore wound him in the very spot where it was tenderest?—destroy his faith in his friend, fill his frank heart with distrust, bring him to the degradation of dogging his friend by night and listening covertly? “Wherefore to me this hell which no heaven can deliver me from? Wherefore to me this indignity which no suffering can wash out? The dreadful, deep, undiscoverable, thrice-mysterious reason,—who will reveal it to the world?”

Tristan's eyes, as, thus questioned, he lifts them at last again to Mark's, express boundless compassion. “Oh! King, I cannot answer; and that which you ask you never can learn!” No, for it is as strange, as full of black mystery, to Tristan as to Mark. It is the very impossible which has happened, the never to be accounted for. Tristan, the soul of honour, has betrayed his friend, and with all those circumstances of aggravation which the friend has just counted off. Nothing can explain it. It is surely like a dream, a curious dream, the worst of the Day's lies. But in a dream also, as we remarked before, there is a right thing to do, for a man of heart. Tristan is not long deciding upon his course. But before acting he

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

turns to Isolde, where she sits with eyes of undiminished love raised toward the companion in shame and agony. In following the call of honour he has no mind to forsake her. "Whither Tristan now departs, will you, Isolde, follow him? The country Tristan means no beam of the sun illumines. It is the dim nocturnal land from which my mother sent me forth, when dying she gave to the light a dead man's child. The refuge to which, having borne me, she carried her love, the wonder-kingdom of the night from which of old I woke. That is what Tristan offers. Thither he goes before. If she will follow, kind and true, let now Isolde say!" With touching more-than-readiness Isolde, trustful and unashamed, declares: "When once before the friend bade her to a strange land, Isolde, kind and true, must follow the unkind one. But now you lead to your own dominions, to show me your heritage. How should I avoid the realm which lies about the whole world? Where Tristan's house and home, there let Isolde take her abode. That she may follow, kind and true, let him now show Isolde the way!" Again for a moment so lost in her that it is no else than as if they were alone in all the world, he slowly bends over her and kisses her forehead. A cry of indignation breaks from Melot. "Traitor! Ha, King, revenge! Shall you endure this outrage?" But Tristan has suddenly cast off the inertia of dreams, bared his sword, and turned about. "Who will match his life against mine?" He gazes full into Melot's face. "He was my friend. He loved me, he held me high. He, more than any, was concerned for my honour, my fame. He made proud my heart to arrogance. He headed the band of those who urged me on to augment my glory and renown by wedding you to the King. Your eye, Isolde, has dazzled him too. From envy he betrayed me to the King--whom I betrayed!" With a feint of attack he springs toward Melot. "Defend

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

yourself, Melot!" Melot quickly thrusts with his sword. Tristan who has not parried, who has let the sword drop from his hand, sinks back wounded in Kurwenal's arms. Isolde casts herself upon his breast. The music makes a brief sorrowful comment—and the curtain falls.

III

The introduction to the third act not only presents the emotions belonging to what shall follow, heaving deep heart-groans and expending itself in pity over the stricken hero; it paints with strange clearness a scene: the sea stretching to the horizon, under leaden sunshine, empty of every sail—the sea which lies in fact before us when the curtain rises, fading off into the sky beyond low battlements which enclose on the outer-side a neglected castle-garden.

Tristan lies with closed eyes upon a couch, in the shadow of a tree. Kurwenal, sitting at his head, bends a careworn face to listen for his breathing. A shepherd's pipe is heard playing a little wavering tune, melancholy in its simplicity to heart-break. The tune grieves itself out. A shepherd looks over the wall and, after a moment watching, calls to Kurwenal, asking if *he* does not yet awake? Kurwenal sadly shakes his head. "Even if he should awake, it would only be to take his leave forever, unless the Physician, the only one who can help us, should first arrive. . . ." Has he seen nothing, he inquires, no ship on the sea? "In that case you should hear a different tune," the shepherd answers, "as merry a one as I can play! But tell me the truth, old friend, what has happened to our master?"—"Let be that question!" Kurwenal heavily turns from it: "not for any asking can you learn! Keep diligent look-out; go, and when you see a ship pipe loud and merrily."

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

The shepherd shades his eyes and looks off over the endless blue waste of the waters. "Barren and empty the sea!" He sets his pipe to his lips again and plays over, withdrawing, the hauntingly melancholy tune of before.

Without premonitory sign of returning consciousness, Tristan's lips move. His voice comes very faint: "The ancient tune. . . what does it wake me?" He opens his hollow eyes. "Where am I?" Kurwenal starts up with a shout of joy: "Ha, that voice! His voice! Tristan, my master! my hero! my Tristan!" Tristan by a great effort brings his mind to consider these sounds, and with great effort speaks: "Who . . . calls me?"—"At last! At last!" Kurwenal's heart overflows. "Life! Oh, life! Sweet life, given back to my Tristan!" Tristan knows him now. "Kurwenal . . . is it you? Where have I been? . . . Where am I?" Kurwenal on the spot assumes that ultra-joyous tone of persons about a sick-bed when their faces are turned toward the patient whom they are determined to infect with hope. "Where you are? In peace, in safety, in freedom! At Kareol, master! Do you not recognise the castle of your fathers?"—"Of my fathers?" Tristan murmurs stupidly. "Just look about you!"—"What—" the sick man asks after a vague glance, "what was the sound I heard?"—"The shepherd's pipe you heard again, after so many days! On the hillside he keeps your flocks."—"My flocks? . . ."—"Master, that is what I said! This is your house, your court and castle. Your people, loyal to the beloved lord, saved for you, as well as they could, the patrimony which my hero once made over to them outright, when he forsook all to travel to a distant land."—"To what land?"—"Cornwall, to be sure!" And the anxious grey-bearded nurse, to rouse in the patient some gleam of joy in being, of pride in past prowess, breaks enthusiastically forth: "Oh, what good

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

fortune Tristan, brave and bonny, met with there! What splendour of glory, what honors he won in the teeth of his enemies!"—"Am I in Cornwall?" Tristan asks discouragingly. "No, no, I have told you! At Kareol."—"How did I get here?" Kurwenal almost laughs, and in the pride of the unhopèd-for hour cracks a joke. "How you got here? Not on horse-back! A little ship brought you, but to the ship I carried you on these shoulders of mine. They are broad, they bore you to the shore. And now you are safe at home, on your own land, the right land, the native land, where amid familiar pastures and homely joys, under the rays of the old sun, from death and wounds you blessedly shall recover!" The rough fellow presses his cheek to his master's breast, like a woman. There is silence. Tristan stares vacantly ahead, vaguely pondering the servant's last words, of which the echo has lingered teasingly in his ear. "Do you believe so?" he says at last. "I know a different thing—but the manner of it I cannot tell you! This where I have awakened is not the place where I have been,—but where I have been—I cannot tell you! I did not see the sun, I saw no earthly scene, nor any people, but what I saw—I cannot tell you! I found myself—where from everlasting I was, whither to everlasting I go: in the boundless realm of the night which girds the world. One knowledge alone belongs to us there,—divine eternal perfection of oblivion! How"—he faintly wails, with a beginning of restlessness—"how have I lost the sense of it? Is it you again, unforgotten longing, driving me back to the light of the day? All that still survives in me, a pitiless torturing love, impels me forth to gaze upon the light which, deceivingly bright and golden, shines, Isolde, upon you!" With the memory of Isolde becoming clear-defined again, as he emerges more completely from the deathlike stupor which had chained him, agitation seizes upon him, greater from moment

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

to moment. Isolde still in the region of the sunshine! Still in the light of the day, Isolde! Unendurable longing to see her repossesses him. For that it is he has turned back from the portals of death, come back from among the shadows, to seek for her, to behold her, to find her, in whom alone it is granted to Tristan to lose himself and cease to be! His old hatred of the day is upon him, and one's sympathy feels, well enough, the distress to his fever of being thus drawn from the dark of unconsciousness and thrust into this glare of summer. By a natural confusion of ideas, as his agitation turns to delirium, this day torturing him, this day upon which he calls a malediction, becomes his old enemy, the Day which used to keep him from her,—and shifts from that into the signal-light which even at night used to warn him off. His delusion complete, he calls imploringly to Isolde, Sweetest, Loveliest, "When, oh, finally, when, will you quench the torch, that it may announce to me my happiness? The light . . . when will it go out? . . . When will the house be wrapped in rest?" He falls back exhausted. Kurwenal, whose joy of a little while before has dropped at the contemplation of this torment, takes heart again from his hope in the good news he has to impart. "The one whom of old I braved, from devotion to you, how am I brought to longing for her now! Rely upon my word, you shall see her, here, and this very day, if only she be still among the living!"

The meaning of his words has not penetrated. Tristan is far away among old scenes. "The torch has not yet gone out! Not yet is the house wrapped in darkness! . . . Isolde lives and keeps watch. . . . She called to me out of the night!"—"If then she lives," Kurwenal eagerly seizes the cue, "let hope comfort you. Dullard as you must esteem Kurwenal, this time you shall not chide him. Ever since the day when Melot, the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

infamous, dealt you the wound, you lay like one dead. The evil wound, how to heal it? Then I, thick-witted fellow, reflected that the one who closed the wound made by Morold could find easy remedy to the injury from Melot's sword. Not long was I deciding upon the best physician! I have sent to Cornwall,—a trusty fellow. It cannot be but that he will bring Isolde over the sea here to you!"

He has understood, Tristan has understood, and started up ablaze, so beside himself with joy that after the great incredulous cry: "Isolde is coming! Isolde is near!" he struggles vainly for breath and words. Then his overflowing gratitude finds an immediate, a pertinent thing to do, and Kurwenal has all in a moment the reward of his long passionately-devoted service. The master in his madness of joy throws his arms around the servant to whom he owes the hope which in a moment has made him strong and well again. "My Kurwenal, you faithful friend, whose loyalty knows no wavering, how shall Tristan ever thank you? My shield and defence in battle and warfare, in pleasure and pain equally prompt at command,—whom I have hated, you have hated, whom I have cherished, you have cherished; when in all truth I served the good Mark, how were you true to him as gold! When I must betray the noble King, how willingly did you deceive him! Not your own, but wholly mine, you suffer with me when I suffer, but what I suffer—that you cannot suffer!" As before the excitement of his pain, now the excitement of his joy is gradually turning to delirium. "This dreadful longing which consumes me, this languishing fire which devours me, if I could describe it, if you could comprehend it, not here would you loiter but would haste to the watch-tower, with every sense astrain longingly would you reach out and spy toward the point where her sail shall appear, where, blown by the wind and urged on by the fire

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

of love, Isolde comes steering to me! . . . There it comes! . . .” he points wildly, “There it comes, with brave speed! . . . See it wave, see it wave, the pennant at the mast! . . . The ship! The ship! It streaks along the reef! Do you not see it? . . . Kurwenal, do you not see it?” With watchful intensity he scans Kurwenal’s face. Kurwenal hesitates, between the wish to humour him by going to the watch-tower, and the fear of leaving him, when the shepherd’s pipe is heard again in the same plaintive tune, and Kurwenal has no heart to pretend. “No ship as yet on the sea!” he announces heavily. Tristan’s excitement, as the notes spin out their thin music, whose message he seems to divine, gradually dies; the happy delusion fades; a deeper sadness than ever, of reaction, closes down upon him. The minor strains which now for a moment hold his flickering attention are full of associations for him, all sorrowful. The sound of them came wafted to him upon the breath of evening when as a child he was told the manner of his father’s death; it came again, plaintive and more deeply plaintive, in the morning grey, when he learned his mother’s fate. And in their day, he wanders reflectively, “when leaving an unborn son he died; when she in dying gave me birth, the ancient air, full of yearning and foreboding, no doubt pierced its sorrowful way to them too,—the ancient air, which has asked me before this, and asks me again in this hour, to what possible end, what destiny, I was born into the world? . . . To what destiny? . . . The ancient song tells me over again: To spend myself in longing and to die! . . .

“No! No!” he in a moment corrects himself, and his misery surges back upon him in all its violence, “That is not what it says! Longing! Longing! To spend myself in longing, not in longing to find death! This longing which cannot die to the distant physician calls out for the peace of death!”

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Confused images crowd upon him of the beginning of this affliction. The voyage to Ireland, the wound of which he was dying, her healing of his wound—only to open it again; her offering him the poisoned cup which when he drank, hoping to be cured of ills forever, a fiery charm was upon him, dooming him never to die, but exist eternally in torture! We remember how in the fragrant summer night and the balmy presence of Isolde he blessed the magic draught which opened the region of all enchantment; but in this hour, parted from her, it seems, forever, the draught which keeps him vainly aching for her presence, which will not let him die apart from her, or find a little rest, which makes him a spectacle of torture for the Day to feed its eyes upon, the draught seems to him verily no blessing. They are the bitter dregs he is drinking now of the cup of wonder. "The dreadful draught," he terms it, and reaching, with the enumeration of his sufferings, the point of cursing it, he has the flashed intuition of a truth; by a poet's spring reaches a conclusion worthy of a philosopher: that he, he himself is responsible for the effect upon him of the drink. "The dreadful draught," he cries, "which devoted me to torment, I myself, I myself, I brewed it! From my father's anguish and my mother's woe, from the tears of love of all my life, from laughing and weeping, joys and hurts, I furnished the poisoned ingredients of the cup!" He had, more plainly, if we seize the sense of his raving, fed and fostered an inherited emotional nature which made him the cup's easy victim. And recognising it, he adds to his curse upon the dreadful cup, with all the strength of his tortured heart, his curse upon him who brewed it,—and exhausted with his own delirious violence drops back in a swoon. Kurwenal, who has vainly striven to calm his frenzy, now sees him with horror relapsed into death-like stillness; he calls him, laments over him and over this fatal

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

love, the world's loveliest madness, which rewards so ill those who follow its lure. "Are you then dead?" he weeps, "Do you still live? . . . Have you succumbed to the curse?" He listens almost hopelessly for his breathing, and starts up with a return of joy: "No! He lives! He rises! How softly his lips stir. . . ."—"The ship!" Tristan murmurs, "Do you not see it yet?"—"The ship? . . . Certainly!" the poor nurse answers, with his determined cheerfulness, "It will arrive this very day. . . . It cannot delay much longer!"—"And upon it"—Tristan describes the vision which is calling back the light to his eyes—"upon it, Isolde. How she beckons, how graciously she drinks to our peace! Do you see her? . . . Do you not see her yet? . . . How sweetly, lovely and gentle, she comes wandering over the plains of the sea. On soft billows of joyous flowers she advances, luminous, toward the land. She smiles comfort to me and delicious rest, she brings me utmost relief. . . . Ah, Isolde, Isolde! How kind, how fair are you! . . . What, Kurwenal," he breaks off with that return to agitation toward which his fever by its law begins from the moment of returning consciousness to drive his poor brain, till, reaching a violence his strength cannot support, it plunges him back exhausted into unconsciousness, "What, Kurwenal, you do not see her? Away, to the watch-tower, dull-witted churl, that the sight may not escape you which is so plain to me! Do you not hear me? . . . To the tower! Quick, to the tower! . . . Are you there? . . . The ship! The ship! Isolde's ship! You must—must see it! The ship! . . . Is it possible," he cries despairingly, "that you do not see it yet?" He has been starting up from his bed, in his eagerness. Kurwenal has struggled with him to keep him down. While he hesitates as before between obedience and fear to leave his patient, the servant realises that the shepherd's pipe has changed its tune,—has

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

changed it for a shrill, lively, tripping air. He listens with all his soul for a second, then with a shout of triumph dashes to the battlements and sends his eyes sweeping the sea. "Ha! The ship! . . . I see it nearing from the north!"—"Did I not know it?" Tristan exults like a child. "Did I not say so? Did I not say she lived and knit me still to life? From the world which for me contains her only, how should Isolde have departed?" His joy is new life poured into him; his agitation this time produces no exhaustion, he has strength for the moment to squander. "Hahei! Hahei!" shouts Kurwenal from his post, "How boldly it steers, how the sails strain in the wind! How it chases, how it flies!"—"The pennant? . . . The pennant?" Tristan holds his breath for the answer. "The bright pennant of joy floats gaily from the topmast!"—"Cheer! The pennant of joy! . . . In the bright light of day, Isolde coming to me! To me, Isolde! . . . Do you see her self?"—"The ship has disappeared behind the reef . . ." Tristan's joy drops like a shot bird. One seems to feel his heart stop. "The reef? . . ." he asks trembling, "Is there danger in it? . . . That is where the surf rages, the ships founder. . . . Who is at the helm?"—"The safest of sea-men."—"Could he betray me? Might he be a confederate of Melot's?"—"Trust him as you would myself!"—"But you, wretch, are a traitor too! . . . Do you see her again?"—"Not yet!"—"Lost!" wails Tristan—but at Kurwenal's shout in a moment more that the ship has cleared the rocks and is sailing up the safe channel into port, springs again to the peaks of joy and promises Kurwenal the bequest of all his worldly goods. And now Kurwenal from his outlook communicates that he sees Isolde,—she is waving,—the keel is in the harbour,—Isolde has sprung ashore. "Down!" Tristan orders wildly, "Down to the shore! Assist her! Assist my lady!"—"I will bring her up here in my arms—trust

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

to them! But you, Tristan," the poor nurse stops on his hurried way down to enjoin, "stay reliably on the bed!"

Tristan, left alone, falls to tossing and writhing with impatience. His burning fever is confused to his sense with the heat of the sun, and this day of joy he calls the sunniest of all days. This tumult of the blood, this jubilant urge to action, this immeasurable delight, this frenzy of joy, how, how to endure them prostrate upon the couch? Up, bravely up and away, where hearts are alive and throbbing! We can see his fever again working itself toward delirium. It reaches this time complete madness. With the proud cry: "Tristan, the hero, in jubilant strength has raised himself up from death!" he in fact lifts himself suddenly quite up. And then no doubt some reminder, at the violent motion, of his wound, suggests to his madness its next wild fancy, that a sort of glory is in a streaming wound, such as he bore while fighting Morold, that he will meet Isolde in the same manner, gloriously bleeding, not ignobly constrained by a bandage. And prompted by some obscure instinct perhaps to relieve a torture of which his flaming brain will not permit him duly to take account, he tears the wrappings from his wound, shouting with gladness, and bidding his blood now flow merrily forth. He jumps from the couch, he goes a few feet in swaying progress toward the castle-gate: She who shall heal the wound forever draws near like a hero, draws near bringing health, let the world fade away before his victorious haste! . . . The victorious haste has taken him a staggering step or two, when Isolde's voice comes borne to him, calling before she appears. "Tristan, Tristan! Beloved!" He stops short and listens, shocked out of the idea of what he was trying to do, losing his grasp on the present. "What? . . . Do I hear the light?" he falters, taken back by the spell of that voice to the old time, when never the light

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

called to him, or never the beloved called to him out of the light, but ever and only out of the night. The suggestion of the darkness now gathering over his eyes is that the torch is going out,—her signal to him to come. “To her!” therefore he cries, “To her!” and is making such effort to hurry as one makes in a dream, when behold, there she is! There she comes flying to him through the castle-gate, breathless with her haste. He has strength enough still, in his transporting joy, to get as far as her arms; but, with the relief of being caught in them, all relaxes, he sinks to the earth. Frightened, she calls him. He turns his eyes upon her with the last of their long yearning, and softly breathes forth his life upon her name. He could not die before she came, but now at once it is grown sweet and easy.

Isolde cannot believe this which she seems to see. She falls on her knees beside him, beseeches, coaxes, reproaches him, and wrings her hands over his obdurate unresponse. “Just for one hour! Just for one hour, be awake to me still! Such long days of terror and yearning Isolde has endured for the sake of one hour to spend with you! Will Tristan defraud her, defraud Isolde of this single infinitely-short last earthly joy? The wound,—where? Let me heal it, that we may have the joyous night together! . . . Oh, do not die of the wound! Let the light of life go out for us clasped together! . . . Too late! Too late! . . . Hard-hearted! . . . Do you punish me so with ruthless sentence? Do you shut your heart to my complaint? . . . Only once . . . only once more! . . . Look, he wakes! Beloved! . . .” Consciousness mercifully forsakes her. She sinks senseless upon his body.

Kurwenal has been standing apart with eyes bent in dumb and rigid despair upon his master. A confused tumult of arms is heard. The shepherd climbs hurriedly over the parapet with the announcement: “A second ship!” Kurwenal starts

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

from his trance of grief and rushes to look off. He breaks into curses, recognising Mark and Melot among the men just landed. His resolution is instantly taken. "Arms and stones! Help me! To the gate!" With the shepherd's help he is fastening and barricading the castle-gate, when Isolde's skipper hurries in with the cry: "Mark is behind me with men-of-arms and folk. Vain to attempt defence, we are overpowered!" Kurwenal does not pause in his preparations: "While I live, no one shall look in here! Take your post and help!" Brangaene's voice is heard, calling her mistress. Kurwenal's excitement, his rage of determination to keep the sight of those helpless embraced bodies sacred from profane eyes, shuts his reason to every sign. Brangaene's cry to him not to close the gate he takes to signify that she is in league with the enemy. Melot's voice, just outside: "Back, madman! Bar not the way!" calls forth a fierce laugh: "Hurrah for the day which gives me the chance to have at you!" The gate resists but a moment; Melot is first to break in. Kurwenal with a savage cry cuts him down. Brangaene is heard calling to him that he labours under a mistake; Mark calling upon him to desist from this insanity. He sees, understands but one thing, to keep out these enemies of Tristan's, defend the master to the last against this intrusion. He orders one of his party to throw back Brangaene, who is coming by the way of the wall; he hurls himself at the invaders now crowding in. In self-defence they draw arms upon the slashing madman. He extorts his death-wound as it were by force from one of them. . . .

Painfully he drags himself along the earth, until he can touch his master's hand: "Tristan, dear lord! Chide not that the faithful one comes along too!" The last note about him as he expires is a fragment of the theme of determined cheerfulness, his pitiful sick-nurse encouragements to Tristan.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Brangaene has reached Isolde and is making frightened efforts to restore her. Mark stands regarding the still forms with profound emotion. Reproach is in his tone when he now speaks, as earlier, the gentle complainingness of one in all things blameless, who, doing all for the best, has met with unmerited suffering. "Dead! All dead!" he mourns, "My hero! My Tristan! Most tenderly-beloved friend! To-day again must you betray your friend, to-day when he comes to give you proof of highest faith. Awake! Awake at the voice of my sorrow, O faithless, faithfulest friend!"

Brangaene's ministrations have brought back a little life to Isolde. Brangaene holds her in her arms and labours to reassure her. "Hear me, sweetest lady, happy news let me report. Would you not trust Brangaene? For her blind fault she has made amends. When you disappeared, quickly she sought the King. No sooner had the secret of the potion been made known to him than in all haste he put to sea, to overtake you, to renounce you, to lead you himself to the friend!" Mark completes the revelation: "When I was brought to understand what before I could not grasp, how happy was I to find my friend free from blame! To wed you to the peerless hero with full sails I flew in your wake,—but how does ravaging misfortune overtake him who came bringing peace! I but made greater the harvest of death! Madness heaped the measure of disaster!"

Isolde has neither heard what they say, nor does she appear to recognise them. Half of her clearly has gone with Tristan, the rest is near taking wing, according to her word: "Where Tristan's house and home, there will Isolde abide." Her own swan-song takes us a little way with her into her *Liebes-tod*, her love-death. Her eyes, fixed in contemplation of his face, have the vision of it returning to life. She

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

sees him re-arise, powerful and loving, growing in glory till he assumes transcendent splendour. "Do you see it, friends,—do you not see it?" she asks, of what shines so vividly before her that her face is transfigured as if with reflected light. And music is shed from this luminous ascending form. . . . "Am I alone to hear it?" she exclaims, it is so clear to her,—music wonderful and soft, which says everything, which gently reconciles one to all. It grows, it swells, it penetrates, uplifts. . . . And what is this enfolding her? Floods of soft air! Billows of perfume! They softly surge and murmur around her. . . . She is in wonder whether to inhale, or to listen, or drink and be immersed and yield up the breath sweetly amid perfumes. . . . Ah, yes, in the billowing surge, in the great harmony, in the breath of the spheres, to sink under, to drown, to be lost . . . that, that will be the supreme ecstasy! . . . As the mysterious experiences she describes absorb her soul, her body sinks softly upon Tristan's. Mark extends his hands in blessing over the dead.

And so the curtain falls on this wonderful and moving drama, and the thousands scatter in an exalted mood, impressed once more with the incomprehensible loveliness of love. The point of fascination of this work does not lie surely in any celebration of enviable joys, or sorrows nearly as enviable; it is not that it is spiritual, which would strengthen its appeal for some, neither that it is sensuous, which would make it alluring to others; it is that it breathes love,—love, indefinable but unmistakable, mysterious but absolute, understood of all, explainable by none, and of greater, or at least more universal, interest than any other emotion. Those equally fitted to enjoy all Wagner's operas show, it is observed, a predilection usually for Tristan and Isolde. If the pre-eminent beauty of

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

the music accounts for this, the fact suggests none the less that Wagner could reach his utmost eloquence on the theme. It is as if the composer had wished for once a fair field to render all he felt and understood of love, and so had chosen a story in which it moves free from ordinary trammels and is permitted an intensity more prolonged, more fervid deeps, languors more abandoned, than love in the shackles of thought and will.

A thing which must not be forgotten. The love of Tristan and Isolde is not to be brought under the head of what is vulgarly termed a guilty love. We have seen how Mark learning the secret of the potion instantly and completely exonerated them and rejoiced that he could return to his faith in Tristan. We know little of love-potions, and had best forget such attempts at rational explanation of them as we may have read, accepting the old story as it is offered, with its cup of magic by which all struggle against the power of love became vain. The lovers must be regarded as essentially innocent. The language of their hearts is always perfectly noble, their music is never sultry.

It seems to matter less, in the case of this opera than of Wagner's other operas, that one should be able to distinguish the motifs. When Fasolt falls, or the dragon, or Mime, it is distinctly interesting to know that the conspicuous phrase thrilling the air is the Curse of the Ring; but we are easily willing to let Glances and Sighs and the Effect of the Love-draught melt into one general fire of tenderness.

There is likewise less need in the case of this opera than, I think, any other of Wagner's, to be familiar beforehand with the argument. Any one seeing the Rhine-gold unprepared would probably not understand anything whatever, as far as the story is concerned. The same is in some degree true of Walkure and Goetterdaemmerung; even of Parsifal one needs

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

to know the inwardness of the plot. But Tristan and Isolde can be grasped through the eye by the dullest. A Woman is seen expressing great anger; there is a scene of coldness and incrimination between her and a Man. They drink from a golden cup and are from that moment lovers. They talk lengthily and most mellifluously of love in a garden at night. They are surprised by one with an evident right to be incensed. The lover is wounded. In a different scene he lies dying. His love comes to him. He expires in her arms and she follows him in death. Any one can understand, every one sympathises.

In spite of which the study of the original text is full of great reward; not only because one will hear the music after all with a richer intellectual enjoyment, but even if one had no hope of hearing the music. The text produces upon one to a singular extent—or do we imagine it?—the effect of music. Its musical counterpart is contained somehow in the written poetry, and mists rise before our eyes when the small black type informs us that Isolde cries in the ears of deaf love: "*Isolde ruft! . . . Isolde kam!*" no otherwise than if the violins played upon our hearts.

LOHENGRIN

LOHENGRIN

I

HENRY THE FOWLER, the German King, coming to Brabant to levy men-of-arms for assistance against the Hungarian, has found the country distracted with internal dissension, troubles in high places. These, as its feudal head, he must settle before proceeding further. He summons together the nobles of Brabant and holds his court in the open, beneath the historical Oak of Justice, on the banks of the Scheldt, by Antwerp.

He calls upon Friedrich von Telramund, conspicuously involved in the quarrel disturbing the land, to lay before him the causes of this. The subject complies: The Duke of Brabant had on dying placed under his guardianship his two children, the young girl Elsa and the boy Gottfried. As next heir to the throne, his honour was very particularly implicated in his fidelity to this trust, the boy's life was the jewel of his honour. Let the King judge then of his grief at being robbed of that jewel! Elsa had taken her young brother to the forest, ostensibly for the pleasure of woodland rambling, and had returned without him, inquiring for him with an anxiety which Telramund judged to be feigned, saying that she had accidentally lost him a moment from sight and upon looking for him failed to find trace of him. All search for the lost child had proved fruitless. Elsa, accused and threatened by her guardian, had by blanched face and terrified demeanour, he states, confessed guilt. A fearful revulsion of feeling toward her had thereupon

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

taken place in him; he had relinquished the right to her hand, bestowed upon him by her father, and taken to himself a wife more according to his heart, Ortrud, descended from Radbot, Prince of the Frisians. Telramund presents to the King the sombre-browed, haughty-looking Princess at his side. "And now," he declares, "I here arraign Elsa von Brabant. I charge her with the murder of her brother, and I lay claim in my own right upon this land, to which my title is clear as next of kin to the deceased Duke; my wife belonging, besides, to the house which formerly gave sovereigns to this land."

A murmur passes through the assembly, in part horror, in part incredulity of so monstrous a crime. "What dreadful charge is this you bring?" asks the King, in natural doubt; "How were guilt so prodigious possible?" Telramund offers as explanation a further accusation, and in doing it gives a hint, not of his motive in accusing Elsa, for the violent ambitious personage is honest in thinking her guilty, but of the disposition of mind toward her which had made him over-ready to believe evil of her: "This vain and dreamy girl, who haughtily repelled my hand, of a secret amour I accuse her. She thought that once rid of her brother she could, as sovereign mistress of Brabant, autocratically reject the hand of the liegeman, and openly favour the secret lover." His excess of vehemence in accusation for a moment almost discredits him. The King demands to see the accused. The trial shall proceed at once. He apprehends difficulty in the case: a charge so black against one so young and a woman, made by a man so impassioned and almost of necessity prejudiced, yet of long confirmed reputation for stern integrity of honour as for bravery. "God give me wisdom!" the King publicly prays.

The King's herald asks if the court of justice shall be held on the spot? The King in answer hangs his shield on the Jus-

LOHENGRIN

tice-Tree, declaring that this shield shall not cover him until he shall have spoken judgment, stern yet tempered with mercy. The nobles all bare their swords, declaring that these shall not be restored to their scabbards until they shall have seen justice done. The herald in loud tones summons the accused, Elsa von Brabant, to appear before this bar.

There advances slowly, followed by her women, a very young, very fair girl, whose countenance and every motion are stamped with gentle modesty. Between the dignity which upbears her and the sorrow which crushes her, she is pathetic as a bruised lily. She looks dreamy withal, as Telramund described her; her expression is mournfully abstracted, her eyes are on the ground. The murmur passes from lip to lip at sight of her: "How innocent she looks! The one who dared to bring against her such a heavy accusation must be sure indeed of her guilt."

She answers the King's first question, of her identity, by a motion of the head alone. One divines that she has wept so much she could only with difficulty summon up voice to speak. "Do you acknowledge me as your rightful judge?" the King proceeds. She lifts her eyes for a moment to read his, and slowly nods assent. "Do you know," he asks further, "whereof you are accused?" Her eyes slide for a second toward Telramund and Ortrud, and she answers by an involuntary shudder. "What have you to reply to the accusation?" With infinite dignity she sketches a meek gesture signifying, "Nothing!"—"You acknowledge then your guilt?" A faint cry, hardly more than a sigh, breaks from her lips: "My poor brother!" and she remains staring sorrowfully before her, as if upon a face invisible to the others.

Struck and moved, the good King, whom we heard promise that his sentence should be *streng und mild*, severe yet merciful,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

speaks kindly now to this strange girl, standing in such danger, yet engrossed in other things,—invites her confidence. “Tell me, Elsa, what have you to impart to me?” With her eyes fixed upon vacancy, she answers, almost as if she spoke in sleep: “In the darkness of my lonely days, I cried for help to God. I poured forth the deep lament of my heart in prayer. Among my moans there went forth one so plaintive, so piercing, it travelled with mighty vibrations far upon the air. I heard it resound at a vast distance ere it died upon my ear. My eyelids thereupon dropped, I sank into sweet slumber. . . .”

All look at her in amazement. She stands before a tribunal on a matter of life and death, and with that rapt look offers a plea of such irrelevancy! “Is she dreaming?” ask some, under-breath, and others, “Is she mad?”

The King tries to bring her to a sense of reality, a sense of her peril. “Elsa!” he cries urgently, “speak your defence before this court of justice!” But she goes on, with an air of dreamy ecstasy: “All in the radiance of bright armour, a Knight drew near to me, of virtue so luminous as never had I seen before! A golden horn hung at his side, he leaned upon his sword. He came to me out of the air, the effulgent hero. With gentlest words and action he comforted me. I will await his coming, my champion he shall be!”

Her audience is impressed by the look of inspiration with which she tells her tale of vision. “The grace of Heaven be with us,” they say, “and assist us to see clearly who here is at fault!”

The King in doubt turns to Telramund: “Friedrich, worthy as you are of all men’s honour, consider well who it is you are accusing!” “You have heard her,” the haughty lord answers excitedly; “she is raving about a paramour! I am not de-

LOHENGRIN

ceived by her dreamy posturing. That which I charge her with, I have certain ground for. Her crime was authoritatively proved to me. But to satisfy your doubt by producing testimony, that, verily, would ill become my pride. Here I stand! Here is my sword! Who among you will fight with me, casting slur upon my honour?"—"None of us!" comes promptly from the Brabantians, "We only fight for you!" The high-tempered gentleman turns somewhat violently upon the King: "And you, King, do you forget my services, my victories in battle over the wild Dane?" The King answers pacifyingly that it would ill beseem him to need reminding of these, that he renders to Telramund the homage due to highest worth, and could not wish the country in any keeping but his. God alone, in conclusion, shall decide this matter, too difficult obviously for human faculty. "I ask you, therefore, Friedrich, Count von Telramund, will you, in life and death combat, entrust your cause to the judgment of God?" Telramund gives assent. "And you I ask, Elsa von Brabant, will you entrust your cause to a champion who shall fight for you under the judgment of God?" She assents likewise. "Whom do you choose for your champion?" the King asks of her. "Now—"eagerly interjects Telramund, "now you shall hear the name of her lover!"—"Listen!" say the rest, with sharpened curiosity. The girl has fixed her eyes again upon the vacancy which to her apparently is full of things to see. "I will await the Knight. My champion he shall be! Hear what to the messenger of God I offer in guerdon. In my father's dominions let him wear the crown. Happy shall I hold myself if he take all that is mine, and if he please to call me consort I give him all I am!"

Four trumpeters turn to the four points of the compass and blow a summons. The herald calls loud: "He who will do battle here, under judgment of God, as champion for Elsa

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

von Brabant, let him appear,—let him appear!” The vibrations die of horns and herald’s voice. There is silence and tension. No one appears, nothing happens. Elsa, at first calm in her security of faith, gives evidence of anxiety. Telramund calls attention to her: “Now witness, witness if I have accused her falsely. Right, by that token, is on my side!” Elsa with childish simplicity appeals to the King: “Oh, my kind sovereign, let me beseech you, one more call for my champion! He is far away, no doubt, and has not heard!” At the King’s command, the trumpets sound again, the herald repeats his summons. There is no answer. The surrounding stillness is unbroken by movement or sound. “By gloomy silence,” the men murmur, “God signifies his sentence!” Elsa falls upon her knees: “Thou didst bear to him my lament, he came to me by Thy command. Oh, Lord, now tell my Knight that he must help me in my need! Vouchsafe to let me see him as I saw him before, even as I saw him before let him come to me now!” The women kneel beside her, adding their prayers to hers.

Elsa’s last word has but died when a cry breaks from certain of the company standing upon an eminence next the river. “Look! Look! What a singular sight!”—“What is it?” ask the others. All eyes turn toward the river. “A swan! A swan, drawing a skiff! . . . A knight standing erect in it. . . . How his armour gleams! The eye cannot endure such brightness. . . . See, he is coming toward us. The swan draws the skiff by a golden chain! A miracle! A miracle!”

Elsa stands transfixed, not daring to look around; but her women look, and hail the approaching figure as that of the prayed-for champion. Amazement at sight of him strikes Telramund dumb. Ortrud upon a glance at the swan wears for one startled moment an expression of unconcealable fear. He stands, the stranger, leaning on his sword, in the swan-drawn

LOHENGRIN

boat; adorned with that excess of lovely attribute not looked for save in figures of dream or of legend, knightly in one and archangelic, with his flashing silver mail and flowing locks and unearthly beauty. As the boat draws to land all involuntarily bare their heads. Elsa at last finds hardihood to turn; a cry of rapturous recognition breaks from her lips.

He steps ashore. All in spell-bound attention watch for his first action, his first words. These are for the swan, and contain not much enlightenment for the breathless listeners. "Receive my thanks, beloved swan. Return across the wide flood yonder from whence you brought me. When you come back, let it be to our joy! Faithfully fulfil your service. Farewell, farewell, my beloved swan!" The mysterious bird slowly draws away from shore and breasts the river in the direction from whence it came. The Knight looks after the diminishing form with such effect of regret as would accompany the departure of a cherished friend.

Voices of wonder pass from person to person; wonder at his impressive beauty, and at themselves for the not unpleasant terror it inspires, the spell it casts over them. He turns at last and advancing toward the King salutes him; "Hail, King Henry! God's blessing stand by your sword! Your great and glorious name shall never pass from earth!" The King, who from his throne beneath the oak has been able to watch the stranger from the moment of his entering the story, is not of two minds concerning so luminous an apparition. "If I rightly recognise the power," he speaks, "which has brought you to this land, you come to us sent by God?"—"I am sent," replies the Knight, "to do battle for a maid against whom a dark accusation has been brought. Let me see now if I shall tell her from among the rest." With but a passing glance at the group of women, unhesitatingly he singles out Elsa, undistin-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

guishable from the others by any sign of rank. "Speak, then, Elsa von Brabant! If I am chosen as your champion, will you without doubt or fear entrust yourself to my protection?" Elsa, who from the moment of seeing him has stood in a heavenly trance, answers this with no discreet and grudging acquiescence; she falls upon her knees at the feet of this her deliverer and hero, and with innocent impetuosity offers him, not assurance of confidence in his arm, or gratitude for his succour, but the whole of herself, made up solely of such confidence and gratitude. "Will you," asks the Knight, while a divine warmth of tenderness invests voice and face, "if I am victorious in combat for you, will you that I become your husband?"—"As I lie here at your feet," the girl replies with passionate humility, "I give over unto you body and soul!" Full of responsive love as is his face, bent upon so much beauty and innocence and adoration, he does not at once gather her up from her knees to his arms. Strangely, he stops to make conditions. "Elsa, if I am to be called your husband, if I am to defend your land and people, if nothing is ever to tear me from your side, one thing you must promise me: Never will you ask me, nor be concerned to know, from whence I came to you, nor what my name and race."—"Never, my lord, shall the question rise to my lips!" She has spoken too readily, too easily, as if she scarcely considered. "Elsa, have you perfectly understood?" he asks earnestly, and repeats his injunction more impressively still: "Never shall you ask me, nor be concerned to know, from whence I came to you, nor what my name and race!" But she, how should she in this moment not promise whatever he asked or do whatever be required? There is no question of pondering any demand of this exquisite dream made flesh, this angelic being come in the darkest hour to make all the difference to her between life and death. As he has asked more

LOHENGRIN

earnestly, she replies more emphatically. "My defender, my angel, my deliverer, who firmly believes in my innocence! Could any doubt be more culpable than that which should disturb my faith in you? Even as you will protect me in my need, even so will I faithfully obey your command!" He lifts her then to his breast with looks of radiant love, uttering the words which confirm his action and make him her affianced. The people around them gaze in moved wonder, confessing an emotion at sight of the *wonnigliche Mann* beyond natural, suggesting magic.

The Silver Knight steps into the midst of the circle about the Justice-Oak, and declares: "Hear me! To you nobles and people I proclaim it: Free from all guilt is Elsa von Brabant. That you have falsely accused her, Count von Telramund, shall now through God's judgment be confirmed to you!" Telramund, obviously in grave doubt, gazes searchingly in the face of this extraordinary intruder. He is sure of his own integrity, relies perfectly on his private information against Elsa; what then is an agent of Heaven's doing on the opposite side? How can this be an agent of Heaven's at all? While he hesitates, the Brabantian nobles warn him in undertones: "Keep from the fight! If you undertake it, never shall you come forth victorious! If he be protected by supernal power, of what use to you is your gallant sword?" But Friedrich, true to his stiffnecked, proud self, bursts forth: "Rather dead than afraid!" and violently addresses the stranger: "Whatever sorcery have brought you here, stranger, who wear such a bold front, your haughty threats in no wise move me, since never have I intended deceit. I accept your challenge, and look to triumph by the course of justice!"

The lists are set, the ground of the duel is marked off with spears driven into the earth. When all is ready, the herald in

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

solemn proclamation warns all present to refrain from every sort of interference, the penalty for any infringement of this rule to be, in the case of a noble, the loss of his hand, in the case of a churl, the loss of his head. He then addresses himself to the combatants, warning them to loyally observe the rules of battle, not by any evil art or trick of sorcery to disturb the virtue of the judgment. God is to judge them according to custom in such ordeals; in Him let them place their trust and not in their own strength. The two champions with equal readiness declare themselves prepared to obey this behest. The King descends from his throne, removes his regal crown, and, while all beside uncover and unite in his prayer, solemnly he makes over, as it were, his function of judge to God. "My Lord and my God, I call upon Thee, that Thou be present at this combat. Through victory of the sword speak Thy sentence, and let truth and falsehood clearly appear. To the arm of the righteous lend heroic strength, unstring the sinews of the false! Help us Thou, O God, in this hour, for our best wisdom is folly before Thee!"

Each of the persons present feels certain of victory for his own side, even dark Ortrud, with the black secrets of her conscience, who believes in no messengers from God, and pins her faith to the well-tested strength of her husband's arm.

At the thrice-repeated blow of the King's sword upon his shield, the combatants enter the lists. The duel lasts but a moment. Friedrich falls, not from any wound, but from the lightening flash of the adversary's sword, brought down upon him with a great sweep. The mysterious weight of it crushes him to the earth, overthrows him, deprives him of force to rise again. The gleaming enemy stands over him with sword-point at his throat: "By victory through God your life now belongs to me. I give it you. Make use of it to repent!"

LOHENGRIN

In the rejoicings that follow, the acclamations of the victorious champion of innocence, no one takes any thought further of the vanquished. Unnoticed he writhes, appalled at the recognition that very God has beaten him, that honour—honour is lost! The wife struggles with a different emotion. Her eyes, unimpressed by his splendour, unconvinced by his victory, boldly scrutinise the countenance of the Swan-brought, to discover the thing he had forbidden Elsa to inquire, what manner of man he be. Who is this, she asks herself, that has overcome her husband, that has placed a term to her power? Is it one whom verily she need fear? Must she give up her hopes because of him?

II.

The Second Act shows the great court in the citadel of Antwerp, bounded at the back by the Palace, where the knights are lodged; at the left, by the Kemenate, the women's apartments; at the right, by the Minster. It is night. The windows of the Palace are brightly lighted; smothered bursts of music from time to time issue forth from them. Telramund and Ortrud, in the poor garb of plebeians, sit on the church-steps. Excommunication and banishment, following the condemnation of God signified by such defeat as Telramund has suffered, have made of them beggars and fugitives. Telramund is sunk in dark reflection. Ortrud, half-crouched like a dangerous animal lying in wait, stares intently at the lighted windows. With sudden effort of resolve Telramund rouses himself and gets to his feet. "Come, companion of my disgrace!" he speaks to the woman beside him; "Daybreak must not find us here." She does not stir. "I cannot move from here," she answers; "I am spell-bound upon this spot. From the contemplation of

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

this brilliant banqueting of our enemies let me absorb a fearful mortal venom, whereby I shall bring to an end both our ignominy and their rejoicing!" Friedrich shudders, in spite of himself, at such incarnate malignity as seems represented by that crouching form, those hate-darting eyes. The sense seizes him, too, in the dreadful soreness of his lacerated pride, how much this woman is responsible for what he has suffered. "You fearful woman!" he cries, "What is it keeps me still bound to you? Why do I not leave you alone, and flee by myself away, away, where my conscience may find rest? Through you I must lose my honour, the glory I had won. The praise that attaches to fair fame follows me no more. My knighthood is turned to a mock! Outlawed, proscribed am I, shattered is my sword, broken my escutcheon, anathemised my house! Whatever way I turn, all flee from me, accursed! The robber himself shuns the infection of my glance. Oh, that I had chosen death sooner than life so abject and miserable! . . ." With the agonised cry, "My honour, oh, my honour! I have lost my honour!" he casts himself face downward upon the ground.

Ortrud has not stirred, or taken her eyes from the bright orange-gold windows. As Telramund's harsh voice ceases, music is heard again from the banquet-hall. Ortrud listens till it has died away; then asks, with cold quiet: "What makes you waste yourself in these wild complaints?"—"That the very weapon should have been taken from me with which I might have struck you dead!" he cries, stung to insanity. Scornfully calm and cold as before, "Friedrich, you Count of Telramund, for what reason," she asks, "do you distrust me?" Hotly he pours forth his reasons. "Do you ask? Was it not your testimony, your report, which induced me to accuse that innocent girl? You, living in the dusky woods, did you not

LOHENGRIN

mendaciously aver to me that from your wild castle you had seen the dark deed committed? With your own eyes seen how Elsa drowned her brother in the tarn? And did you not ensnare my ambitious heart with the prophecy that the ancient princely dynasty of Radbot soon should flourish anew and reign over Brabant, moving me thereby to withdraw my claim to the hand of Elsa, the immaculate, and take to wife yourself, because you were the last descendant of Radbot?"—"Ha! How mortally offensive is your speech!" she speaks, but suppresses her natural annoyance to continue: "Very true, all you have stated, I did say, and confirmed it with proof."—"And made me, whose name stood so high in honour, whose life had earned the prize due to highest virtue, made me into the shameful accomplice of your lie!"—"Who lied?" she asks coolly. "You!" he unceremoniously flings at her; "Has not God because of it, through his judgment, brought me to shame?"—"God? . . ." She utters the word with such vigour of derision that he involuntarily starts back. "Horrible!" he shudders after a moment; "How dreadful does that name sound upon your lips!"—"Ha! Do you call your own cowardice God?" He raises against her his maddened hand: "Ortrud! . . ."—"Do you threaten me? Threaten a woman?" she sneers, unmoved; "Oh, lily-livered! Had you been equally bold in threatening him who now sends us forth to our miserable doom, full easily might you have earned victory in place of shame. Ha! He who should manfully stand up to the encounter with him would find him weaker than a child!"—"The weaker he," Telramund observes, ill-pleased, "the more mightily was exhibited the strength of God!"—"The strength of God! . . . Ha, ha!" laughs loud Ortrud, with the same unmoderated effect of scorn and defiance, which sends her husband staggering back a step, gasping. "Give me the opportunity,"

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

she proceeds, with a return to that uncanny quiet of hers, "and I will show you, infallibly, what a feeble god it is protects him!"

Telramund is impressed. She is telling him after all that which he would like to believe. Still, the impression of the day's events is strong upon him,—his overthrow at God's own hand. After that, how dare he trust her? And yet— But then again— "You wild seeress," he exclaims, torn with doubt, "what are you trying, with your mysterious hints, to entangle my soul afresh?" She points at the Palace, from the windows of which the lights have disappeared. "The revellers have laid them down to their luxurious repose. Sit here beside me! The hour is come when my seer's eye shall read the invisible for you." Telramund draws nearer, fascinated, reconquered to her by this suggestion of some dim hope rearising upon his blighted life. He sits down beside her and holds close his ear for her guarded tones. "Do you know who this hero is whom a swan brought to the shore?"—"No!"—"What would you give to know? If I should tell you that were he forced to reveal his name and kind there would be an end to the power which laboriously he borrows from sorcery?"—"Ha! I understand then his prohibition!"—"Now listen! No one here has power to wring from him his secret, save she alone whom he forbade so stringently ever to put to him the question!"—"The thing to do then would be to prevail upon Elsa not to withhold from asking it!"—"Ha! How quickly and well you apprehend me!"—"But how should we succeed in that?"—"Listen! It is necessary first of all not to forsake the spot. Wherefore, sharpen your wit! To arouse well-justified suspicion in her, step forward, accuse him of sorcery, whereby he perverted the ordeal!"—"Ha! By sorcery it was, and treachery!"—"If you fail, there is still left the expedient of violence."—"Vio-

LOHENGRIN

lence?"—"Not for nought am I learned in the most hidden arts. Every being deriving his strength from magic, if but the smallest shred of flesh be torn from his body, must instantly appear in his original weakness."—"Oh, if it might be that you spoke true!" wistfully groans Telramund. "If in the encounter you had struck off one of his fingers," Ortrud continues, "nay, but one joint of a finger, that hero would have been in your power!" Rage and excitement possess Telramund at the retrospect of the combat in which he had been beaten, not, as he had supposed, by God, but by the tricks of a sorcerer, and at the prospect of avenging his disgrace, proving his uprightness, recovering his honour. But—he is checked by a sudden return of suspicion of this dark companion and adviser. "Oh, woman, whom I see standing before me in the night," he addresses the dim figure, "if you are again deceiving me, woe to you, I tell you, woe!" She quiets him with the promise of teaching him the sweet joys of vengeance. A foretaste of these they have, sitting on the minster-steps, gloating upon the walls which enclose the unconscious foes. "Oh, you, sunk in sweet slumber, know that mischief is awake and lying in wait for you!"

A door opens in the upper story of the Kemenate. A white figure steps out on to the balcony and leans against the parapet, head upon hand. The pair in the shade watch with suspended breath, recognising Elsa. She is too happy, obviously, to sleep; her heart is too heavily oppressed with gratitude for all that this wonderful day has brought. The well-born gentle soul that she is must be offering thanks to everything that has contributed to this hour; and so, girlishly, she speaks to the wind: "You breezes, whom I used so often to burden with my sadness and complaints, I must tell you in very gratitude what happy turn my fortunes have taken! By your means he came travelling to me, you smiled upon his

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

voyage, on his way over the wild waves you kept him safe. Full many a time have I troubled you to dry my tears. I ask you now of your kindness to cool my cheek aglow with love!" Ortrud has kept basilisk eyes fixed upon the sweet love-flushed face touched with moonlight. "She shall curse the hour," speaks the bitter enemy in her teeth, "in which my eyes beheld her thus!" She bids Telramund under-breath leave her for a little while. "Wherefore?" he asks. "She falls to my share," comes grimly from the wife; "take her hero for yours!" Telramund slips obediently away into the black shadow.

Ortrud watches Elsa for a time breathing her innocent fancies to the wind; then abruptly cuts short the pastime, calling her name in a loud, deliberately-plaintive tone. Elsa peers anxiously down in the dark court. "Who calls me? How lamentably did my name come shuddering through the night!"—"Elsa, is my voice so strange to you? Is it your mind to disclaim all acquaintance with the wretch whom you have driven forth to exile and misery?"—"Ortrud, is it you? What are you doing here, unhappy woman?"—"Unhappy woman? . . ." Ortrud repeats after her, giving the turn of scorn to the young girl's pitying intonation; "Ample reason have you indeed to call me so!" With dark artfulness she rouses in Elsa more than proportionate compassion for her plight, by casting upon the tender-conscienced creature the whole blame for it. In no scene does the youthfulness of Telramund's ward appear more pathetically than in this. "In the solitary forest, where I lived quiet and at peace, what had I done to you," Ortrud upbraids, "what had I done to you? Living there joylessly, my days solely spent in mourning over the misfortunes that had long pursued my house, what had I done to you,—what had I done to you?"—"Of what, in God's name, do you accuse me?" asks Elsa, bewildered. Ortrud pursues

LOHENGRIN

in her chosen line of incrimination at all cost: "However could you envy me the fortune of being chosen for wife by the man whom you had of your free will disdained?"—"All-merciful God," exclaims Elsa, "What is the meaning of this?"—"And if, blinded by an unhappy delusion, he attributed guilt to you, guiltless, his heart is now torn with remorse; grim indeed has his punishment been. Oh, you are happy! After brief period of suffering, mitigated by conscious innocence, you see all life smiling unclouded before you. You can part from me well-pleased, and send me forth on my way to death, that the dull shadow of my grief may not disturb your feasts."

Ortrud's policy is completely successful; this last imputation is intolerable to the generous girl, made even more tender-hearted than wont by her overflowing happiness. "What mean sense of Thy mercies would I be showing," she cries, "All-powerful, who have so greatly blessed me, should I repulse the wretched bowed before me in the dust! Oh, nevermore! Ortrud, wait for me! I myself will come down and let you in!"

She hurries indoors. Ortrud has gained what she wanted, intimate access to the young Duchess's ear, that she may pour her poison into it. She has a moment's joy of triumph, while the fair dupe is hastening down to her within. We discover at this point that she is no Christian like the rest; that the secret gods of the secret sorceress are the old superseded ones, Wotan and Freia. For that reason it was the Silver Knight did not impress her as he did the others. She could not admit that he came from God, the false god whose name we heard her pronounce with such unconcealable scorn; but, herself a witch, supposed that he performed the feat through wizardry. She had explained the phenomenon to her husband in good faith; she believed what she said, that were he forced to tell his name,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

or might a shred of flesh be torn from him, he would stand before them undisguised, shorn of his magic power. Wild with evil joy at the success of her acting, she calls upon her desecrated gods to help her further against the apostates. "Wotan, strong god, I appeal to you! Freia, highest goddess, hear me! Vouchsafe your blessing upon my deceit and hypocrisy, that I may happily accomplish my vengeance!"

At the sound of Elsa's voice calling: "Ortrud, where are you?" she assumes the last abjectness. "Here!" she replies, cowering upon the earth. "Here at your feet!" Simple Elsa's heart melts at the sight, really out of all reason soft, out of all reason unsuspecting. Yet she is infinitely sweet, in her exaggeration of goodness, when she not only pardons, but begs pardon of this fiendish enemy for what the latter may have had to suffer through her. She eagerly puts out her hands to lift Ortrud from her knees. "God help me! That I should see you thus, whom I have never seen save proud and magnificent! Oh, my heart will choke me to behold you in so humble attitude. Rise to your feet! Spare me your supplications! The hate you have borne me I forgive you, and I pray you to forgive me too whatever you have had to suffer through me!"—"Receive my thanks for so much goodness!" exclaims feelingly the accomplished actress. "He who to-morrow will be called my husband," continues Elsa, in her young gladness to heap benefits, "I will make appeal to his gentle nature, and obtain grace for Friedrich likewise."—"You bind me to you forever with bonds of gratitude!" With light innocent hand Elsa places the crowning one on top of her magnanimous courtesies. "At early morning let me see you ready prepared. Adorned in magnificent attire, you shall walk with me to the minster. There I am to await my hero, to become his wife before God. His wife! . . ." The sweet pride with which

LOHENGRIN

she says the word, the soft ecstasy that falls upon her at the thought, stir in Ortrud such hatred that she cannot forbear, even though the time can hardly be ripe, taking the first step at once which is to result in the quick ruin of the poor child's dreams. "How shall I reward you for so much kindness, powerless and destitute as I am? Though by your grace I should dwell beside you, I should remain no better than a beggar. One power, however, there is left me; no arbitrary decree could rob me of that. By means of it, peradventure, I shall be able to protect your life and preserve it from regret."—"What do you mean?" asks Elsa lightly. "What I mean is—that I warn you not too blindly to trust in your good fortune; let me for the future have care for you, lest disaster entangle you unaware." Elsa shrinks back a little, murmuring, "Disaster?" Ortrud speaks with impressive mystery close to her ear: "Could you but comprehend what marvellous manner of being is the man—of whom I say but this: May he never forsake you through the very same magic by which he came to you!" Elsa starts away from Ortrud, in horror at such impiety,—disbelief in the highest. But in a moment her displeasure gives way to sadness and pity for the darkness in which this other woman lives. "Poor sister!" she speaks, most gently, "you can hardly conceive how unsuspecting is my heart! You have never known, belike, the happiness that belongs to perfect faith. Come in with me! Let me teach you the sweetness of an untroubled trust. Let me convert you to the faith that there exists a happiness without leaven of regret!" This warm young generous sweetness which makes Elsa open to any appeal, blind to grossest fraud, merely exasperates Ortrud's ill-will. She reads in it plain pride of superiority. As she could not admit in the Knight of the swan a god-sent hero, she cannot see in Elsa an uncommonly good-hearted girl. "Oh,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

that arrogance!" she is muttering while Elsa is exhorting her; "It shall teach me how I may undo that trustfulness of hers! Against it shall the weapons be turned, her pride shall bring about her fall!"—Elsa by gesture inviting, the other feigning confusion at so great kindness, the two pass into the house together.

The first grey of dawn lightens the sky. Telramund, who has been spying unseen, exults to see mischief in the person of his wife entering the house of the enemy. He is not an evil man, he cares beyond all for honour, and his consciousness of a certain unfairness in the methods his wife will use is implied in his exclamation; but the violent man so rages under a sense of injustice that all weapons to him are good which shall bring about the ruin of those who have ruined him. "Thus does mischief enter that house! Accomplish, woman, what your subtlety has devised. I feel no power to check you at your work. The mischief began with my downfall; now shall you plunge after me, you who brought me to it! One thing alone stands clear before me: The robbers of my honour shall see destruction!"

Daylight brightens. The warders sound the reveillé from the turret. Telramund conceals himself behind a buttress of the minster. The business of the day is gradually taken up in the citadel court. The porter unlocks the tower-gate that lets out on to the city-road; servants come and go about their work, drawing water, hanging festive garlands. At a summons from the King's trumpeters, nobles and burghers assemble in great number before the Minster. The King's herald coming out on the Palace-steps makes the following announcements: Firstly: Banished and outlawed is Friedrich von Telramund, for having undertaken the ordeal with a knowledge of his own guilt. Any one sheltering or associating with him shall accord-

LOHENGRIN

ing to the law of the realm come under the same condemnation. Secondly: The King invests the unknown God-sent man, about to espouse Elsa, with the lands and the crown of Brabant; the hero to be called, according to his preference, not Duke, but Protector of Brabant. Thirdly: The Protector will celebrate with them this day his nuptial feast, but they shall join him tomorrow in battle-trim, to follow, as their duty is, the King's arms. He himself, renouncing the sweetness of repose, will lead them to glory.

These proclamations are followed by general assent and gladness. A small group there is, however, of malcontents, former adherents of Telramund's, who grumble: "Hear that! He is to remove us out of the country, against an enemy who has never so much as threatened us! Such a bold beginning is ill-beseeming. Who will stand up against him when he is in command?"—"I will!" comes from a muffled figure that has crept among them, and Friedrich uncovers his countenance. "How dare you venture here, in danger as you are from the hand of every churl?" they ask him, frightened. "I shall dare and venture more than this ere long, and the scales will drop from your eyes. He who presumptuously calls you forth to war, I will accuse him of treason in the things of God." The Brabantian gentlemen, afraid of his being overheard or recognised, conceal the rash lord among them, and compel him toward the church, out of sight.

Forerunners of the wedding-procession, young pages come from the Kemenate, and clear a way through the crowd to the church-door. A long train of ladies walk before the bride. There are happy cheers when she appears, dazzling in her wedding-pomp; there are blessings and the natural expressions of devotion from loyal subjects. The pages and ladies stand massed at either side of the Minster-door to give their mistress

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

precedence in entering. She is slowly, with bashful lowered eyes, mounting the stairs, when Ortrud, who in magnificent apparel has been following in her train, steps quickly before her, with the startling command, given in a furious voice: "Back, Elsa! I will no longer endure to follow you like a serving-maid! Everywhere shall you yield me precedence, and with proper deference bow before me!" This is, we believe, no part of any deep-laid plan of Ortrud's, though it does in the event help along her scheme; it is an uncontrollable outburst of temper at sight of Elsa in her eminence of bridal and ducal glory. "What does the woman mean?" ask the people of one another, and step between Elsa and her. "What is this?" cries Elsa, painfully startled; "What sudden change has taken place in you?"—"Because for an hour I forgot my proper worth," Radbot's daughter continues violently, "do you think that I am fit only to crawl before you? I will take measures to wipe out my abasement. That which is due to me I am determined to receive!"—"Woe's me!" complains Elsa, "Was I duped by your feigning, when you stole to me last night with your pretended grief? And do you now haughtily demand precedence of me, you, the wife of a man convicted by God?" Ortrud sees here her opportunity again to introduce the wedge of suspicion into her victim's mind. "Though a false sentence banished my husband, his name was honoured throughout the land, he was never spoken of save as the pattern of virtue. His sword was well-tested and was feared—But yours, tell me, who that is present knows him? You cannot even yourself call him by his name! . . . Nay, but can you?" she taunts the shocked, pale-grown bride, who has found no more than force to gasp,—“What does she say? She blasphemes! Stop her lips!”—"Can you tell us whether his lineage, his nobility, be well attested? From whence the river

LOHENGRIN

brought him and whither he will go when he leaves? No, you cannot! The matter, no doubt, would present difficulties, wherefore the astute hero forbade all questioning!" Elsa has found her voice at last, and speaks right hotly: "You slanderer! Abandoned woman! Hear, whether I can answer you! So pure and lofty is his nature, so filled with virtue is that noblest man, that never shall the person obtain forgiveness who presumes to doubt his mission! Did not my hero overcome your husband by the power of God in singular combat? You shall tell me then, all of you, which of the two must lawfully be held true?"—"Ha! That truth of your hero's!" mocks Ortrud, fearfully ready of tongue; "How soon were it cast in doubt, should he be forced to confess the sorcery by which he practises such power! If you fear to question him concerning it, all may believe with good right that you are not free yourself from the suspicion that his truth must not be too closely looked into!" Elsa is near fainting with the anguish of this encounter; her women surround and comfort her.

The doors of the Palace have opened, the King and the Knight of the Swan, with great retinue of nobles, issue forth, bound for the church and wedding-ceremony. They arrive upon the scene before the confusion is allayed occasioned by the quarrel between vulture and dove. Elsa runs to the arms of the Protector. Receiving her and glancing naturally about for explanation, he beholds the dangerous Ortrud, whom his clear eye reads, restored to splendour, part of the wedding-train, and remarks upon it with amazement to the trembling bride. "What do I see? That unhappy woman at your side?"—"My deliverer," weeps Elsa, "shield me from her! Scold me, for having disobeyed you! I found her in tears here before my door; I took her in out of her wretchedness. Now see how dreadfully she rewards my kindness! . . . She taunts me for

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

my over-great trust in you!" The Knight fixes his eyes sternly upon the offender, who somehow cannot look back bold insult as she would wish, but stands spell-bound under the calm severity of his glance. "Stand off from her, you fearful woman. Here shall you never prevail!—Tell me, Elsa," he bends over her tearful face, "tell me that she tried vainly to drop her venom into your heart?" Elsa hides her face against his breast without answering. But the gesture with its implied confidence satisfies him; the tears increase his protecting tenderness. "Come!" he draws her toward the church; "Let your tears flow in there as tears of joy!"

The wedding-train forms again and moves churchward in wake of King and bride and groom. But the wedding to-day is not to come off without check and interruption—an ill omen, according to the lore of all peoples. As the bridal party is mounting the Minster-steps, there starts up in front of it, before the darkly gaping door, the figure of Telramund. The crowd sways back as if from one who should spread infection, so tainted did a man appear against whom God through his ordeal had spoken judgment. "Oh, King, oh, deluded princes, stand!" he cries, barring their way. He will not be silenced by their indignant threats; he makes himself heard in spite of shocked and angry prohibitions. "Hear me to whom grim injustice has been done! God's judgment was perverted, falsified! By the tricks of a sorcerer you have been beguiled!" The King's followers are for seizing and thrusting him aside; but the soldier, famous no longer ago than yesterday for every sort of superiority, stands his ground and says what he is determined to say. "The man I see yonder in his magnificence, I accuse of sorcery! As dust before God's breath, let the power be dispersed which he owes to a black art! How ill did you attend to the matters of the ordeal which was to strip me of

LOHENGRIN

honour, refraining as you did from questioning him, when he came to undertake God's fight! But you shall not prevent the question now, I myself will put it to him. Of his name, his station, his honours, I inquire aloud before the whole world. Who is he, who came to shore guided by a wild swan? One who keeps in his service the like enchanted animals is to my thinking no true man! Let him answer now my accusation. If he can do so, call my condemnation just, but if he refuse, it must be plain to all that his virtue will not bear scrutiny!" All eyes turn with unmistakable interest of expectation toward the man thus accused; wonder concerning what he will reply is expressed in undertones.

He refuses point-blank, with a bearing of such superiority as an attack of the sort can hardly ruffle. "Not to you, so forgetful of your honour, have I need here to reply. I set aside your evil aspersion; truth will hardly suffer from the like!"—"If I am in his eyes not worthy of reply," Friedrich bitterly re-attacks, "I call upon you, King, high in honour indeed. Will he, on the ground of insufficient nobility, refuse likewise to answer you?" Aye, the Knight refuses again, with an assurance partaking in no wise of haughtiness, but speaking a noble consciousness of what he is which places him above men's opinions. "Yes! even the King I must refuse to answer, and the united council of all the princes! They will not permit doubt of me to burden them, they were witnesses of my good deed. There is but one whom I must answer. Elsa!" He turns toward her with bright face of confidence, and stops short at sight of her, so troubled, so visibly torn by inward conflict, her bosom labouring, her face trembling. There is no concealing it, she would have wished him to answer loudly and boldly, to crush those mocking enemies, Ortrud and Telramund, with the mention of a name, a rank, which should have bowed them

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

down before him in the dust, abject. There is silence, while all, entertaining their respective reflections, watch Elsa, and she struggles with herself, staring blindly ahead. His secret no doubt,—thus run her pitiable feminine thoughts,—if revealed publicly like this would involve him in some danger. Ungrateful indeed were it in her, saved by him, to betray him by demanding the information here. If she knew his secret, however, she would surely keep it faithfully. . . . But—but—she is helpless against it, doubt is upheaving the foundations of her heart!

It is the good King who speaks the right, the pertinent word. "My hero, stand up undaunted against yonder faithless man! You are too indubitably great to consider accusations of his!" The nobles readily accept the King's leadership, in this as in other matters. "We stand by you," they say to the Knight. "Your hand! We believe that noble is your name, even though it be not spoken."—"Never shall you repent your faith!" the Knight assures them. While the nobles crowd about him; offering their hands in sign of allegiance, and Elsa stands apart blindly dealing with her doubt, Telramund steals unperceived to her side and whispers to her: "Rely on me! Let me tell you a method for obtaining certainty!" She recoils, frightened, yet without denouncing him aloud. "Let me take from him the smallest shred of flesh," he continues hurriedly, "the merest tip of a finger, and I swear to you that what he conceals you shall see freely for yourself. . . ." In his eagerness, forgetful really at last of honour, he adds the inducement, "And, true to you forever, he will never leave you!"—"Nevermore!" cries Elsa, not so vigorously, however, but that he finds it possible still to add: "I will be near to you at night. Do but call me, without injury to him it shall be quickly done!" The Knight has caught sight of him and is instantly

LOHENGRIN

at Elsa's side, crying astonished, "Elsa, with whom are you conversing?" The poor girl sinks overwhelmed with trouble and confusion at his feet. "Away from her, you accursed!" speaks the Knight in a terrible authoritative voice to the evil pair; "Let my eye never again behold you in her neighbourhood!" Gently he lifts the bride; he scans her face wistfully: "In your hand, in your loyalty, lies the pledge of all happiness! Have you fallen into the unrest of doubt? Do you wish to question me?" He asks it so frankly and fearlessly, albeit sorrowfully; he stands there so convincingly brave-looking and clear-eyed, full of the calm effect of power, that Elsa gazing at him comes back to her true self and answers with all her heart: "Oh, my champion, who came to save me! My hero, in whom I must live and die! High above all power of doubt my love shall stand!" He clasps her in his arms, solemnly saluting her. . . .

And once more the wedding-party sets itself upon the way to church. Organ-music pours forth from the Minster-portals. With her foot on the threshold the bride turns an eager, instinctive, searching, almost frightened look upon the groom. In answer, he folds reassuring arms around her. But, even so held, woman-like she looks back, in spite of herself, over her shoulder, toward Ortrud, who receives the timid glance with a detestable gesture of triumph. Properly frightened, the bride turns quickly away, and the procession enters the church.

III

It is night. The stately bridal apartment awaits its guests. Music is heard, very faint at first, as if approaching through long corridors. Preceded by pages with lights, there enter by

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

different doors a train of women leading Elsa, a train of nobles and the King leading the Knight.

The epithalamium is sung to its end. After grave and charming ceremony, with blessings and good wishes, all withdraw, leaving the bride and groom alone. Elsa's face is altogether clear again of its clouds; all is forgotten save the immeasurable happiness which, as soon as the doors discreetly close, impels her to his arms; clasped together, seated upon the edge of a day-bed, they listen in silence to their wedding-music dying slowly away. When all is still at last, in the dear joy of being "alone, for the first time alone together since first we saw each other," life seems to begin for each upon new and so incredibly sweeter terms. The stranger knight, whom mystery enwraps, shows himself, despite certain sweet loftiness which never leaves him, most convincingly human. In the simplest warm way, a way old-fashioned as love, we hear him rejoice: "Now we are escaped and hidden from the whole world. None can overhear the exchange of greetings between our hearts. Elsa, my wife! You sweet white bride! You shall tell me now whether you are happy!"—"How cold must I be to call myself merely happy," she satisfies him liberally, "when I possess the whole joy of Heaven! In the sweet glowing toward you of my heart, I know such rapture as God can alone bestow!" He meets her gratitude with an equal and just a little over. "If, of your graciousness, you call yourself happy, do you not give to me too the very happiness of Heaven? In the sweet glowing toward you of my heart, I know indeed such rapture as God can alone bestow!" He falls naturally, happy-lover-like, into talking of their first meeting and beginning love: "How wondrous do I see to be the nature of our love! We had never seen, but yet had divined, each other! Choice had been made of me for your champion, but it was love showed

LOHENGRIN

me my way to you. I read your innocence in your eyes, by a glance you impressed me into the service of your grace!"—"I too," she eagerly follows, "had seen you already, you had come to me in a beatific dream. Then when wide-awake I saw you standing before me, I knew that you were there by God's behest. I would have wished to dissolve beneath your eyes and flow about your feet like a brook. I would have wished like a flower shedding perfume out in the meadow to bow in gladness at your footfall. Is this love? . . . Ah, how do my lips frame it, that word so inexpressibly sweet as none other, save alas! your name . . . which I am never to speak, by which I am never to call the highest that I know!" There is no return indicated in this of any doubt of him. Elsa is in this moment certainly all trust. It is but an expression of love chafing a little at the reticence which seems a barrier one must naturally wish away, if hearts are to flow freely together. Hardly warningly, just lovingly, he interrupts her: "Elsa!"—"How sweetly" she remarks enviously, "my name drops from your lips! Do you grudge me the dear sound of yours? Nay, you shall grant me this boon, that just in the quiet hours of love's seclusion my lips should speak it. . . ." He checks her, as before, unalarmed, without reproach, by an exclamation of love. "My sweet wife!"—"Just when we are alone," she coaxes, "when no one can overhear! Never shall it be spoken in hearing of the outside world." Instead of answering directly, he draws her to him and turns to the open casement overlooking the garden; he gazes thoughtfully out into the summer night and answers by a sort of tender object-lesson. "Come, breathe with me the mild fragrance of the flowers. . . . Oh, the sweet intoxication it affords! Mysteriously it steals to us through the air, unquestioningly I yield myself to its spell. A like spell it was which bound me to you when I saw you,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Sweet, for the first time. I did not need to ask how you might be descended, my eye beheld you, my heart at once understood. Even as this fragrance softly captures the senses, coming to us wafted from the enigmatic night, even so did your purity enthrall me, despite the dark suspicion weighing upon you!"

That she owes him much she is ready and over-ready to own. It is almost embarrassing to owe so much, to owe everything, and no means of repaying, because the whole of oneself is after all so little. "Oh, that I might prove myself worthy of you!" she sighs, "that I need not sink into insignificance before you! That some merit might lift me to your level, that I might suffer some torture for your sake! If, even as you found me suffering under a heavy charge, I might know you to be in distress! If bravely I might bear a burden for you, might know of some sorrow threatening you! Can it be that your secret is of such a nature that your lip must keep it from the whole world? Disaster perhaps would overtake you, were it openly published. If this were so, and if you would tell it to me, would place your secret in my power, oh, never by any violence should it be torn from me, for you I would go to death!" The bridgroom cannot but be touched by such devoted gallant words from the fairest lips. Off guard, he murmurs fondly, "Beloved!"—"Oh, make me proud by your confidence, that I may not so deeply feel my unworthiness!" she pleads, eagerly following up the advantage of his not having yet remonstrated; "Let me know your secret, that I may see plainly who you are!" Wilfully deaf to his imploring, "Hush, Elsa!" more and more urgently she presses: "To my faithfulness reveal your whole noble worth! Without fear of regret, tell me whence you came. I will prove to you how strong in silence I can be!"

LOHENGRIN

Her words, all at once, their significance penetrating fully, have brought a change in him. Gravely he moves apart from her, and his voice is for a moment stern as well as sorrowful: "Highest confidence already have I shown you, placing trust as I unhesitatingly did in your oath. If you will never depart from the command you swore to observe, high above all women shall I deem you worthy of honour." But he cannot continue in that tone, the altogether human bridegroom. At sight of the pained look his severity has produced, he goes quickly again to her, he makes instant reparation for his momentary harshness. "Come to my breast, you sweet, you white one!" he profusely caresses and consoles; "Be close to the warmth of my heart! Bend upon me the soft light of your eye in which I saw foreshining my whole happiness! . . ." And just to satisfy her so far as he can, to prove still further his great love, he proceeds: "Oh, greatly must your love compensate me for that which I relinquished for your sake! No destiny in God's wide world could be esteemed nobler than mine. If the King should offer me his crown, with good right I might reject it. The only thing which can repay me for my sacrifice, I must look for it in your love. Then cast doubt aside forever. Let your love be my proud security! For I came to you from no obscure and miserable lot. From splendour and joy am I come to you!" Oh, the ill-inspired speech! What he dreamed must unite closer, in the momentary mood of the incalculable feminine being he is dealing with, divides further. The thought is instantly back in her mind which she had smothered and then forgotten, the idea suggested by Ortrud, implied by Friedrich, that mysteriously as he came the unknown Knight may presently be going away from her. The hour that should have been so sweet and quiet in the "fragrant chamber adorned for love" of the wedding-song, is turned to strain and

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

dreadfulness. "God help me!" wails her passionate alarm, "What must I hear? What testimony from your own lips! In your wish to beguile me, you have announced my lamentable doom! The condition you forsook, your highest happiness lay bound in that. You came to me from splendour and joy, and are longing to go back. How could I, poor wretch, believe that my faithful devotion would suffice you? The day will come which will rob me of you, your love being turned to rue!"—"Forbear, forbear thus to torture yourself!"—"Nay, it is you, why do you torture me? Must I count the days during which I still may keep you? In haunting fear of your departure, my cheek will fade; then you will hasten away from me, I shall be left forlorn."—"Never" he endeavours to quiet her, "never will your winning charm lessen, if you but keep suspicion from your heart."—"How should I tie you to me?" she pursues undeterred her fatal train of thought; "How might I hope for such power? A creature of weird arts are you, you came here by a miracle of magic. How then should it fare but ill with me? What security for you can I hold?" She shrinks together in sudden terror and listens. "Did you hear nothing? Did you not distinguish footsteps?"—"Elsa!"—"No, it is not that! . . . But there . . ." she stares vacantly ahead, pointing,—her face how changed from the sweet, glowing face of so short a time ago!—and describes what her over-excited fancy paints on the empty air before her: "Look there! The swan! The swan! There he comes, over the watery flood. . . . You call him, he draws the boat to shore. . . ."—"Stop, Elsa! Master these mad imaginings!" the poor lover strives with her, in despair.—"Nay, nothing can give me rest," she declares, wholly unmanageable, wholly unreasonable, "nothing can turn me from these imaginings, but, though I should pay for it with my life, the knowledge who you are!"—"Elsa, what are

LOHENGRIN

you daring to do?"—"Uncannily beautiful man, hear what I must demand of you: Tell me your name!"—"Forbear!"—"Whence are you come?"—"Alas!"—"What manner of man are you?"—"Woe, what have you done?" Elsa utters a shriek, catching sight of Telramund with a handful of armed men stealing in by the door behind her husband's back,—the explanation of the sound she had heard. With a cry of warning, she runs for her husband's sword and hands it to him. Quickly turning he rewards Friedrich's ineffectual lunge with a blow that stretches him dead. The appalled accomplices drop their swords and fall to their knees. Elsa, who had cast herself against her husband's breast, slides swooning to the floor. There is a long silence. The Knight stands, deeply shaken, coming to gradual realisation of the whole sorrowful situation. All the light, the bridegroom joy, have faded from his face. With a quiet suggestive of infinite patience and some strange superiority of strength, some unearthly resource, he considers this ruin, his audible comment on it a single sigh, more poignant than if it were less restrained: "Woe! Now is all our happiness over!" Very gently he lifts Elsa, sufficiently revived to realise that she has somehow worked irreparable destruction, and decisively places her away from him. By a sign he orders Telramund's followers to their feet and bids them carry the dead man to the King's judgment-place. He rings a bell; the women who appear in answer, he instructs: "To accompany her before the King, attire Elsa, my sweet wife! There shall she receive my answer, and learn her husband's name and state."

At daybreak the Brabantian lords and their men-at-arms are assembling around the Justice-Oak in readiness to follow the King. The King, with noble expressions of gratitude for

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

their loyalty, takes command of them. "But where loiters," he is inquiring, "the one whom God sent to the glory, the greatness of Brabant?" when a covered bier is borne before him and set down in the midst of the wondering company, by men whom they recognise as former retainers of Telramund's. This is done, explain these last, by order of the Protector of Brabant.

Elsa attended by her ladies appears at the place of gathering. Her pale and sorrow-struck looks are attributed naturally to the impending departure of her husband for the field.

Armed in his flashing silver mail, as he was first seen of them, he now appears on the spot. Cheers greet him from those whom he is to lead to battle and victory. When their shouts die, he makes, standing before the King, the startling announcement that he cannot lead them to battle, the brave heroes he has convoked. "I am not here as your brother-of-arms," he informs their consternation; "You behold me in the character of complainant. And, firstly . . ." he solemnly draws the pall from the dead face of Telramund, "I make my charge aloud before you all, and ask for judgment according to law and custom: This man having surprised and assailed me by night, tell me, was I justified in slaying him?"—"As your hand smote him upon earth," the horrified spectators cry in a voice, "may God's punishment smite him yonder!"—"Another accusation must you hear," the Knight continues; "I speak my complaint before you all. The woman whom God had given to my keeping has been so far misguided as to forget her loyalty to me!" There is an outcry of sorrowful incredulity. "You all heard," he proceeds, steeled to severity, "how she promised me never to ask who I am? She has broken that sacred oath. To pernicious counsel she yielded her heart. No longer may I spare to answer the mad questioning of her doubt. I could deny the

LOHENGRIN

urgency of enemies, but must make known, since she has willed it, my name,—must reveal who I am! Now judge if I have reason to shun the light! Before the whole world, before the King and kingdom, I will in all truth declare my secret. Hear, then, if I be not equal in nobility to any here!” There runs a murmur through all the impressed multitude, not of curiosity, but regret that he should be forced to speak; the uneasy wish is felt that he might not.

His face has cleared wonderfully. As his inward eye fixes itself upon images of the home, the *Glanz und Wonne*, he is about to describe, memory lights his countenance as if with the reflection of some place of unearthly splendour. “In a far land,” his words fall measured and sweet, “unapproachable to footsteps of yours, a fastness there stands called Monsalvat. In the centre of it, a bright temple, more precious than anything known upon earth. Within this is preserved as the most sacred of relics a vessel of blessed and miraculous power. It was brought to earth by a legion of angels, and given into the guardianship of men, to be the object of their purest care. Yearly there descends from Heaven a Dove, to strengthen anew its miraculous power. It is called the Grail, and there is shed from it into the hearts of the knights that guard it serene and perfect faith. One chosen to serve the Grail is armed by it with over-earthly power; against it no evil art can prevail, before the vision of it the shades of death disperse. One sent by it to distant countries to champion the cause of virtue retains the holy power derived from it as long as he remains unknown. Of nature so mysteriously sublime is the blessing of the Grail that if disclosed to the layman’s eye it must withdraw. The identity of a Knight of the Grail must therefore not be suspected. If he is recognised—he must depart! Now hear my reply to the forbidden question. By the Holy Grail

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

was I sent to you here. My father Parsifal in Monsalvat wears the crown. A Knight of the Grail am I and my name is Lohengrin!"

The people gaze at him in awe and worshipping wonder. The unhappy Elsa, feeling the world reel and grow dark, gasps for air and is falling, when Lohengrin catches her in his arms, all his sternness melting away, his grief and love pouring forth in tender reproach. "Oh, Elsa, what have you done to me? From the first moment of beholding you, I felt love for you enkindling my heart, I became aware of an unknown happiness. The high faculty, the miraculous power, the strength involved in my secret, I wished to place them all at the service of your purest heart. Why did you wrest from me my secret? For now, alas, I must be parted from you!" She expends herself in wild prayers to be forgiven, to be punished by whatsoever affliction, only not to lose him. He feels sorrow enough, immeasurable sorrow, heart-break, but not for an instant hesitation. "The Grail already is offended at my lagging! I must—must go! There is but one punishment for your fault, and its hard anguish falls equally upon me. We must be parted,—far removed from each other!" He turns to the King and nobles imploring him to remain and lead them as he had promised against the enemy. "Oh, King, I may not stay! A Knight of the Grail, when you have recognised him, should he disobediently remain to fight with you, would have forfeited the strength of his arm. But hear me prophesy: A great victory awaits you, just and single-hearted King! To the remotest days shall the hordes of the East never march in triumph upon Germany!"

From the river-bank comes a startling voice: "The swan! The swan!" All turn to look. A cry of horror breaks from Elsa. The swan is seen approaching, drawing the empty boat.

LOHENGRIN

Less master of himself than theretofore, Lohengrin, realising the last parting so near, gives unmistakable outward sign of his inward anguish. "The Grail already is sending for the dila-tory servant! . . ." Going to the water's edge he addresses to the snowy bird words which no one can quite comprehend. "My beloved swan, how gladly would I have spared you this last sorrowful voyage. In a year, your period of service having expired, delivered by the power of the Grail, in a different shape I had thought to see you.—Oh, Elsa," he returns to her side, "oh, that I might have waited but one year and been witness of your joy when, under protection of the Grail, your brother had returned to you, whom you thought dead! . . . When in the ripeness of time he comes home, and I am far away from him in life, you shall give him this horn, this sword, this ring. . . ." He places in her hands the great double-edged sword, the gold-en horn from his side, the ring from his finger. "This horn when he is in danger, shall procure him help. This sword, in the fray, shall assure him victory. But when he looks at the ring let him think of me who upon a time delivered you from danger and distress. Farewell, farewell! My sweet wife, farewell! The Grail will chide if I delay longer. . . . Farewell!" He has kissed over and over again the face of the poor woman who, annihilated by grief, has not the power to make motion or sound. He places her, with terrible effort of resolution, in the arms at last of others, and hastens, amid general lamentation, to the shore.

Ortrud, lost in the crowd, has watched all. She has in re-ality gained nothing by the disaster to Elsa, but she exults in it. Further revenge for what she has suffered from Elsa's mere existence, for the bitterness of her husband's death at the hand of Elsa's husband, she seeks recklessly in a revelation which cannot but hold danger for herself. In the insanity

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

of her mingled despair and gloating hate, her hurry to hurt. she does not wait until the powerful antagonist be well out of the way of retorting—Lohengrin has but one foot as yet in the boat,—before she cries, “Go your way home, go your way, O haughty hero, that gleefully I may impart to this fair fool who it is drawing you in your boat. By the golden chain which I wound about him, I recognised that swan. That swan was the heir of Brabant!—I thank you,” she mockingly addresses Elsa, “I thank you for having driven away the Knight. The swan must now betake himself home with him. If he had remained here longer, that hero, he would have delivered your brother too!” The whole dark scheme of Ortrud’s ambition now lies bare: She had compassed the disappearance of the heir to the crown of Brabant, changing him by magic art into a swan; had cast the guilt of his disappearance upon Elsa, and married the man who upon Elsa’s condemnation would have become Duke. Through no neglect of her own was Ortrud’s brow still bare of the crown. At the cry of execration that greets her revelation, she faces them all, drawn up to her proud height, and announces: “Thus do they revenge themselves, the gods from whom you turned your worship!”

But Lohengrin had not been too far, nor too engrossed in going, to hear her words. The Knight of the Grail has sunk on his knees and joined his hands in prayer. All eyes are upon him, his eyes earnestly heavenward. For a long moment all is in motionless suspense. A white dove flies into sight, and hovers over the boat. With the gladness of one whose prayer is heard, Lohengrin rises and unfastens the chain from the swan; this vanishes from sight, leaving in its place a beautiful boy in shining garments, whom Lohengrin lifts to the bank. “Behold the Duke of Brabant! Your leader he shall be!” At sight of him, Ortrud utters a cry of terror, Elsa, drawn for a

LOHENGRIN

moment out of her stupor, a cry of joy. She catches the brother in her arms—But looking up, after the first transport of gladness, and seeing the place empty where her husband had stood, his boat gone from sight, forgetting all else, she sends after him a despairing cry, “My husband! My husband!”

In the distance, at a bend of the river, the boat reappears for a moment, drawn now by the dove of the Grail. The Silver Knight is seen standing in it, leaning on his shield, his head mournfully bowed. Sounds of sorrow break from all lips. The sight pierces like a sword through the heart of the forsaken bride. She sinks to the ground *entseelt*—exanimate.

Such figures as play their part in this story, the Silver Knight, with his swan and faery skiff, the fair falsely-accused damsel, the wicked sorceress, could hardly be painted in flagrant life-colours. The music of Lohengrin brings to mind pictures one seems to remember on vellum margins of old books of legend, where against a golden background shine forth vivid yet delicate shapes, in tints brilliant yet soft as distance, the green of April, the rose of day-break, the blue of remote horizons.

There is an older story on these same lines, the story of Cupid and Psyche, an allegory, we are told, of Love and the Soul. And an allegory is meant to teach somewhat. And what does this teach—but that one must be great? Not enough to be innocent, kind, loving, pure as snow, like Elsa, a being golden and lovely through and through, such as could lure down a sort of angel from his heaven. Beside it all, great one must be. Life, the Sphinx, requires upon occasion that one be great. Just a little greatness, so to speak, and Elsa would first of all have recognised the obligation to keep her word; would further have trusted what must have been her

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

own profound instinct about the man she loved, rather than the suggestions of others troubling her shallow mind-surface. Had she been great, we may almost affirm, she would have known that he was great; she would have trusted truth and greatness though they came to her unlabelled.

But Life, the Sphinx, proposed to her a riddle, and because she was no more than a poor, sweet, limited woman she could not solve it, and Life ground her in its teeth and swallowed her up.

TANNHÄUSER

TANNHÄUSEP

I.

WE are shown in the Ouverture of Tannhäuser the power which contended for the young knight and minstrel's soul: the appeal of good is symbolised by the solemn chant of the pilgrims; of evil, by the voice of Venus, the song of the Sirens, the Bacchic dance.

We are not informed how he came into the Hill of Venus, but when we see him at the Landgrave's court, which we are told he forsook of yore in offended pride, we think we divine. He is more greatly gifted than any of his associates. By his sense of superiority he is made—young and hot-blooded as he is,—haughty, quick, impatient. They cannot suffer his overbearing way. We can imagine how upon an occasion he left them, after a round quarrel, in a fury of vexation, sick with disgust at the whole world of such slow, limited creatures, the whole world of petty passions and narrow circumstances, in a mood to sell himself to the Devil for something in life which should seem to him worth while, of satisfactory size, peer to himself. And so his feet had come in the familiar valley suddenly upon a new path, and been led to the interior of the mountain where Venus, driven from the surface of the earth by the usurping Cross, had taken refuge with all her pagan train. There the Queen of Love herself had contented him, and his thirsty youth had thought this no doubt a sufficient crown

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

of life; this had met all his vast desires, appeased all his boundless pride. He had lived in the rosy atmosphere there he knew not how long, existence one feast, at which everything in man was satisfied, heart, imagination, senses—everything but his soul.

We first have sight of him lying at the feet of Venus, his head pillowed on her lap. There are dances and revels for their delight, but he has fallen asleep,—and in his dream he hears, through the song of stupefying sweetness in which the Sirens hold forth enkindling promises, a fragment of anthem, the long-forgotten music of church-bells. He starts awake. The tender queen draws down his head again with a caress. “Beloved, where are your thoughts?” But his neglected soul has in dream made its claim. The sweetness of all this other is found by sudden revulsion cloying to the point of despair. “Too much!” he cries wildly, “Too much! Oh, that I might awaken!” At just that touch, that sound in sleep of bells, his whole poor humanity has flooded back upon him, and at the goddess’s indulgent “Tell me what troubles you?” his weak infinite homesickness breaks bounds. “It seemed to me, in my dream, that I heard—what so long has been foreign to my ear!—the pleasant pealing of bells. Oh, tell me, how long is it that I hear them no more? I cannot measure the length of my sojourn here. There are no longer for me days or months, since I no longer see the sun or the sky’s friendly constellations. The grass-blade I see no more, which, clothing itself with fresh green, brings in the new summer. The nightingale I hear no more announcing the return of Spring. Am I never to hear them, never to see them more?”

Venus, mildly amazed at folly so prodigious, reproaches him for this complaining, these regrets. What, is he so soon weary of the marvels with which her love surrounds him? Discon-

TANNHÄUSER

tented so soon with being a god? Has he so soon forgotten the old unhappiness? "My minstrel, up! Take your harp! Sing the praise of love, which you celebrate so gloriously that you won the Goddess of Love herself." Tannhäuser, thus bidden, seizes the harp and warmly entones a hymn of praise to her, which from its climax of ardour, suddenly—as if his lips were tripped by the word "mortal" occurring in the song,—turns into a prayer to her to release him. "But mortal, alas, I have remained, and your love is over-great for me. A god has the capacity to enjoy perpetually, but I am the creature of change. Not joy alone can satisfy my heart, after pleasure I yearn for sorrow. Forth from your kingdom I must fare. Oh, Queen, Goddess, let me depart!"

Reproachful questions succeed on her part: Of what neglect has her love been guilty, of what can he accuse her? In reply, grasping his harp again, he adds fiery praise to praise of her greatness, the wonders of her kingdom,—to drop again into his prayer for release: "But I, amid these rosy perfumes, I yearn for the odour of the forest, yearn for the pure blue of our skies, the fresh green of our sward, the sweet song of our birds, the dear sound of our bells! Forth from your kingdom I must fare. O Queen, Goddess, let me depart!"

The beautiful queen's surprise is turning to anger, without ceasing to be surprise. "You sing the praise of my love, and wish at the same time to flee from it? My beauty, is it possible, has brought surfeit?" He tells her, disarmingly as he may, what must fall incomprehensibly on her pagan ears, that it is that over-great beauty of hers he must shun, that never was his love greater, never sincerer, than in this moment when he must flee from her forever.

She drops chiding then, truly alarmed, and tempts. She paints to him with glowing art the delights awaiting them; to

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

these she bids him with the persuasive voice of love. When the goddess of beauty thus invites a mortal, she feels secure in counting upon his forgetting all else. But this Tannhäuser, with the dreamy echo in his earth-born ears of the church-bells of home, he catches, instead of her beautiful form to his breast, his harp again. He grants that her beauty is the source of all beauty, that every lovely marvel has its origin in her: against the whole world, he promises, he will thereafter be her champion, but—back to the world of earth go he must, for here he can but become a slave. Freedom, for freedom he thirsts! Battle and struggle he must have, though he should meet through them defeat and death. Forth from her kingdom he must fare! Queen, Goddess, let him depart!

“Go, then, madman, go!” she bids him in lovely wrath. “Traitor, see, I do not hold you back! I leave you free, go your way, go your way! Let your doom be to have that which you yearn for! Go back to cold mankind, before whose gross dismal delusion we Gods of Joy fled deep into the warm bosom of the earth. Go back to them, infatuated! Seek your soul’s welfare and find it never! Not long before your proud heart will surrender. I shall see you humbly draw near. Broken, trampled, you will come seeking me, will invoke the wonders of my power!” Unheeding of the remainder, he seizes avidly upon his dismissal. “Ah, lovely goddess, farewell! Never will I return!” What—never return? She threatens with her curse, if he shall not return, him and the whole human race: in vain let them go seeking for her miracles, let the world become a wilderness and have for its hero a slave! But yet—he cannot have meant what he said, he will come back, let him say that he will come back! “Nevermore!” cries the captive of this suffocating prison-house of love, as he pants upon the threshold of freedom, “nevermore let joy of love delight me!”

TANNHÄUSER

—"Come back" she desperately entreats, "when your heart impels you!"—"Forever your beloved flees!"—"Come back when the whole world rejects you!"—"Through penance I shall be absolved from sin!"—"Never shall you gain forgiveness! Come back if the gates of salvation close to you!"—"Salvation! . . . My hope of salvation lies in the Blessed Mary!"

At that name, Venus uttering a cry vanishes, and with her the dim-lit subterranean kingdom. . . .

Tannhäuser finds himself standing in a sunny well-known valley, near to a road-side shrine of the Blessed Mary at whose hem he had caught. The Wartburg is in sight, where he was used in former days to take part in song-tournaments. In dim distance looms the Hörselberg, concerning which a sinister rumour ran: that in the heart of it the pagan goddess Venus still lived and held her court. All the landscape smiles, the trees are in blossom, nature is altogether at her loveliest. Oh, so sweeter to the ears of the resuscitated knight than the song of sirens, comes the homely tinkle of sheepbells. A little shepherd pipes and sings in joy over the return of May.

Tannhäuser stands statue-still, as if he feared by the slightest movement to wake himself, to dispel the vision.

A band of penitents, starting on a pilgrimage to far-off Rome, defile past the Virgin's shrine, saluting her and asking her grace upon their pilgrimage. Their pious chant stirs in Tannhäuser deep, long-untouched chords. At the same moment that the aroused sense of pollution would overwhelm him, the reminder shines forth to him in the pilgrims' words of the possibility of forgiveness and regeneration through repentance and penitential practices. A very miracle of God's grace it seems to him, by which he sees the door of hope open to him anew. The weight of his emotion forces him to his knees; he makes his own

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

the words of the pilgrims wending their way out of sight: "Ah, heavily oppresses me the burden of sin, no longer can I carry it. No more will I therefore of ease and rest, but choose for my portion pain and effort." The pilgrims' voices come drifting more and more dyingly, the breeze wafts sounds of church-bells. With tears Tannhäuser bows his head and sinks into prayer.

Cheerful hunting-horns breaking upon the air do not rouse him, nor the approach of the hunters. They are the Landgrave and a group of his favorite minstrel-knights. Catching sight of the kneeling figure, they stop to observe it. The minstrel Wolfram recognises their old companion, Heinrich, who had left them, time gone, to disappear utterly. The circumstances of their parting are suggested by the first words uttered when Tannhäuser starts to his feet and faces them. "Is it truly yourself?" asks the Landgrave; "Have you come back to the community which you forsook in impatient arrogance?"—"Tell us what is implied by your return?" says the minstrel Biterolf; "Reconciliation? Or renewed battle?"—"Do you come as friend or foe?" asks the minstrel Walther. So much the more probable thing does it seem that he comes as foe that there is a challenging note in the address of all—save Wolfram. The latter, the gentlest soul among them, has taken account of the old companion's countenance; his sympathy is quick to interpret it, by a word he changes the mood toward him of all the others. "As a foe? How can you ask? Is that the bearing of arrogance? Oh, welcome back among us, you singer bold, who too long have been absent from our midst!"—"Welcome if you come peaceably-minded!" say the others; "Welcome if you approach as a friend! Welcome among us!"

The Landgrave, after adding his gracious greeting to the greetings of the others asks where he has been this long time.

TANNHÄUSER

"Far, far from here I wandered," Tannhauser replies, with a vagueness mysteriously pregnant, "where I found neither peace nor rest. Inquire not! I have not come to contend with you. Forgive the past and let me go my way!"

Marvellously softened by this novel gentleness in the formerly so testy and proud companion, all now with a single mind desire him to stay, nay, refuse to let him go. He turns from them resolutely: "Detain me not! It would ill profit me to tarry! Never more for me repose! Onward and ever onward lies my way, to look backward were undoing!" He is hastening away, despite their entreaties, when Wolfram pronounces the name which brings him to an instantaneous standstill. "Remain beside Elizabeth!"—"Elizabeth!" Tannhäuser repeats after him, reverently as if the name were consecrated bread upon his lips; "Oh, power of Heaven, is it you calling that sweet name to me?" At the spectacle of his emotion, Wolfram turns to the Landgrave: "Have I your leave, my lord, to be the herald to him of his good fortune?" The Landgrave consents. "Inform him of the magic spell he has wrought, and may God lend him virtue to loose it worthily!" Wolfram imparts to Henry then that when in the days before his disappearance the minstrels were wont to contend with him in song, whatever the event of the contest, one prize there had been won by him alone, his song alone had had power to enthrall the interest of that most virtuous maid, Elizabeth. And when he had proudly withdrawn from their midst, her heart had closed to the singing of the remaining minstrels; her cheek had lost bloom, she had shunned their song-tourneys. "Return to us, O daring minstrel," Wolfram concludes, "let your song resound alongside of ours, that she may no longer be absent from our festivals, that her star once more may shed brightness upon us!" The fellow-minstrels join their voices to Wolfram's,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

to press the recovered companion to remain among them. "Let discord and quarrel be laid aside! Let our songs form one harmony! As brothers regard us henceforward!"

Great gladness has fallen upon the knight, crushed to earth a moment past by a sense of sin; a swift rebound lifts up the heart that had asked of this fair and over-fair world just restored to him only opportunity to expiate and be made clean. Can this be true, this which seems like the most madly impossible of beautiful dreams? Elizabeth! the Landgrave's niece, the fair and faultless, the saint! . . . No doubt in the old days he had worshipped her, not daring to lift his eyes above her foot-prints, had loved as a moth may a star. That lily had shone in his dreams, cool and pure and unattainable, by the mysterious attraction of opposites compelling homage and desire more than might any being less removed in nature from his hot, pleasure-thirsty, sense-ridden, undisciplined self. An element in his discontent with the earth had been perhaps his sense of life-wide separation from her, of unsurpassable barriers between them, the vanity of aspiration. And now the Landgrave permits her name to be used to keep him from departing! And with his long-dead soul come back to intenser life than ever, that lily more than ever calls forth the worshipping devotion of his reawakened highest self. In total self-abandonment of joy, he breaks forth: "To her! To her! Oh, conduct me to her! Ah, I recognise it now, the lovely world from which I was cut off! The sky it is, looking down upon me, it is the greensward flaunting rich multitude of flowers. Spring with its thousand voices of joy has entered into my soul, and my heart in sweet ungovernable tumult cries out aloud: To her! To her!"

"Praise be to the power," say Landgrave and minstrels, "which has dispelled his arrogance!" What the remembrance is in this circle of Tannhäuser's arrogance appears from the

TANNHÄUSER

frequency of reference to it. The remainder of the hunting-retinue has now joined the Landgrave; the scene is brilliant with swarming figures of hunters, hounds, and horses. With bright horn-calls the train starts homeward, on its rejoicing way "to her!"

II

The Hall of Minstrels in the Wartburg, where the famous song-tournaments were held. Such a tournament is directly to take place, and Elizabeth for the first time after many days will preside over it. She enters the hall while it is still empty of guests, and looks around with glad affectionate eyes, like one returning home after long exile. She is sincere as she is innocent, the white princess, "*une âme sans détours*," and speaks the truth of her heart with wonderfully little circumlocution, as to herself now in her salutation of the hall, so to others later. "Once more I greet you, beloved hall,—oh, joyously greet you, place ever dear! In you reawaken echoes of his singing, and draw me from my melancholy dream. When he departed from you, how desolate did you appear to me! Peace deserted me, joy deserted you! But now that my breast rides high with gladness you appear to me proud again and splendid as of yore. The one who gives new life both to you and to me no longer tarries afar. All hail to you, beloved hall, all hail!"

Wolfram, who loves Elizabeth, but in such unworldly, elevated, self-abjuring wise that he can for the sake of happiness to her set wholly aside hopes, desires, and jealousies of his own, finds for Tannhäuser this opportunity of seeing the Princess alone. He leads him into her presence and effaces himself, while their interview lasts, among the arches at the back of the hall.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Tannhäuser, flushed and radiant, magnificent in his festival robes of a noble minstrel-knight, casts himself impetuously at her feet. His sudden appearance startles her painfully. Her manner speaks a confusion almost tremulous: "Father in Heaven! . . . Do not kneel! . . . It is not meet that I should see you here!"—"What else so meet? Oh, do not leave," he cries ardently, "and suffer me to remain thus at your feet!" Her timidity wears away like dew in sunshine; we fancy the play of faint gracious smiles upon her next words. "Stand up, then! Not in this place must you kneel, for this hall is your rightful kingdom. Oh, rise to your feet! Take my thanks for having come back to us. Where did you tarry so long?" Tannhäuser rises slowly. As when the Landgrave asked him the same question, a shadow falls across his countenance, his answer is vague and mysterious. "Far from here, in distant, distant lands. Heavy oblivion has dropped between to-day and yesterday. All memory of the past has quickly faded from me, and one thing only I know: that I had not hoped ever again to bow before you, or ever again to lift my eyes to you."—"What was it then that brought you back?"—"A miracle it was, an inconceivable, highest miracle!"—"Oh, from the depths of my heart I give thanks to God for that miracle!" she exclaims, and confused at her own fervour catches herself back, only to proceed further, with the candour of an angel: "Your pardon, if I hardly know what I am about! I move as if in a dream, and am feather-brained as a child, given over, hand-bound, in thrall to a miraculous power! Hardly do I recognise myself; oh, do you help me to solve the enigma of my heart!" Not only with the candour of an angel, but the simplicity of very high rank, accepting the prerogative of her station to step forward a little way to meet the favoured lover, she lays before him the puzzle over the small difficulty of which

TANNHÄUSER

her purity and greatness make one unable to smile. "To the wise songs of the minstrels I was wont to listen often and with delight. Their singing and their descanting appeared to me a charming pastime. But what strange new life did your song awake in my breast! Now it pierced me through like pain, now roused me to mad joy. Emotions I had never felt! Desires I had never known! Things that until then had seemed to me lovely lost their charm by comparison with delights I had not even a name for! Then, when you went from among us, peace and happiness were gone too. The minstrels' songs seemed to me an uninspired affair, dim of meaning, languid of execution. My dreams were full of dull pain, my waking hours a dejected dream. All capacity for joy forsook my heart. Heinrich, Heinrich, what had you done to me?" The "singer bold," the "daring minstrel," is of a candour matching her own. "Oh, give praise to the god of Love!" he cries; "He it was who touched my strings! He spoke to you through my songs, and it is he who has brought me back to you!" They unite in joyful praise of the hour which has revealed this miracle-working of Love's.

Wolfram watching them from his distance sighs gently: "Thus fades from all my life the light of hope!" Tannhäuser, encountering him as he hastens away, lets a wave of his joy overflow in an impetuous embrace of the friend.

Elizabeth stands on the terrace overlooking the castle-court and the valley to watch the lover out of sight, moved and simply happy as a woman who is not a saint. Her whiteness loves that colour; her paleness warms itself at that glow; her gentleness glories in that force. She makes no question but that he is worthy of her love. Her high spirituality has intuition no doubt of the vast potentialities of good in that superabundant life, which of itself seems a virtue as well as a charm.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

When the Landgrave enters she cannot bear his searching eyes upon her transparent face, and hides it against his breast. "Do I find you in this hall which for so long time you have avoided? You are lured at last by the song-festival we are preparing?" he questions her. She cannot answer, she falters: "My uncle! . . . Oh, my kind father!"—"Are you moved at last," he asks kindly, "to open your heart to me?" She lifts her face and bravely raises her eyes. "Look into my eyes, for speak I cannot!" He reads, and does not press her. "Let then for a brief space longer your sweet secret remain unspoken. Let the spell remain unbroken until yourself you have power to loose it. Be it as you please! Song, which has awakened and set working such wonders, shall to-day unfold the same and crown them with consummation. Let the Lovely Art now take the work in hand. The nobles of my lands already are assembling, bidden by me to a singular feast. In greater numbers they flock than ever before, having heard that you are to be Princess of the gathering."

The Hall of Minstrels gradually fills with these same nobles and their ladies. They salute the Landgrave and the Princess, and take their places to the well-known, long-loved march. The minstrels have seats apart from the rest, facing their audience. The Landgrave addresses them nobly, with gracious compliment for the skill shown theretofore by them in singing as in fighting, for their victorious championship of virtue and the true faith, high tradition and all things lovely. Let them offer the guests to-day a banquet of song, upon the occasion of the return among them of the "daring singer" whose absence they so long had deplored, whom a wonderful mystery has brought back into their neighbourhood. He sets to the song-contestants as their task to define the nature of love. He who shall most worthily besing it shall receive the prize from

TANNHÄUSER

Elizabeth's hand. Let his demand be bold as he will, the Landgrave's care it shall be to see his wish granted.

Lots are drawn. Fortune appoints Wolfram to open the song-feast. He preludes pensively, and sets forth in an improvisation of slow and stately gait his delicate dreamer's sentiments: Glancing around this noble assemblage, his heart kindles at sight of so many heroes, valiant, German, and wise,—a proud oak-forest, verily, splendid, fresh and green. And among them fair and virtuous ladies, fragrant garland of beautiful flowers. The eye swoons, drunken with gazing, the poet's song grows mute before such splendour of loveliness. He fixes his eyes, then, upon one only of the stars in that dazzling firmament. His spirit is forced to worship and bow in prayer. And, behold, the vision he has of a miraculous fount, from which his spirit may draw sacred joys, his heart receive ineffable refreshment. And never would he wish to trouble that fountain, never with criminal presumption stir those waters,—but offer himself up to it in self-sacrificing adoration, and shed for its sake the last of his blood. From these words the company may apprehend what he conceives to be the nature of love at its purest.

There is warm applause from the noble knights and ladies, whether because they understand the star to be Elizabeth, and the fountain the pure love she inspires, or because it was the ideal of that period of song-contests and Courts of Love and chivalry to love with a reverence that precluded any near approach to the lady elected for adoration. A poet might marry and have seven children, while regarding with exalted passion and celebrating in enraptured song,—making into his star, his sacred fountain, his Muse, some dazzling remote princess, held to be too fair and good by far for human nature's daily food. The audience, when Wolfram resumes his seat, cry: "So it is! So it is!" and loudly praise his song.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

Tannhäuser has lent ear somewhat listlessly. This hall has been called his rightful kingdom; he sits among the other minstrels consciously like a young monarch. At the closing figure of Wolfram's rhapsodical rhetoric, the image of the fount, a shadowy smile of superiority has dawned upon his face. As the applause dies, he grasps his harp and rises to take exception to Wolfram's definition. Such a song-feast was in fact a song-debate. His words come warm and ready: "I too, Wolfram, may call myself so fortunate as to behold what you have beheld. Who is there unacquainted with that fountain? Hear me loudly exalt its virtue! But yet can I not approach those waters without sense of warm longing. That burning thirst I must cool. Comforted I set lips to the spring. In full draughts I drink joy, unmixed with doubt or fear, for inexhaustible is the fountain, even as inextinguishable is my desire. That my longing therefore may be prolonged eternally, eternally I drink refreshment at the well. Know Wolfram, thus do I conceive of love's truest essence!"

There is deep silence when he has ended. One person only in the large assemblage has given a sign of approval, made a little gesture of assent, and that is Elizabeth, at bottom a very simple normal woman, who does not recognise herself as a star or a sacred well unapproachable to the one she loves. But as all refrain, she timidly checks herself, and waits to hear the rest.

Walther has taken his harp, has risen; in growing excitement, touched with indignation, he sweeps the strings: "The fountain spoken of by Wolfram, by the light of the soul I too have looked into its depths! But you, who thirst to drink at it, you, Heinrich, know it verily not! Permit me to tell you, accept the lesson: That fountain is true virtue. Devoutly you shall worship it and sacrifice to its limpid purity. Should you lay

TANNHÄUSER

lip to it, to cool your unhallowed passion, nay, should you but sip at the outermost brim, forever gone were its miraculous power! If you shall gain life from that fountain, through the heart, not the palate, must you seek refreshment!" Again there is lively applause. Tannhäuser springs to his feet, the old contemptuousness toward these companions,—compends of density, conventionality, and hypocrisy!—curving his lip. "Oh, Walther, singing as you have done, how direly have you misrepresented love! Through such languors and timidities as you describe, the world would unmistakably go dry! To the glory of God in his exalted distance, gaze at the heavens, gaze at its stars. Pay tribute of worship to such marvels, because they pass your comprehension. But that which lends itself to human touches, which lies near to your heart and senses, that which, formed of the same clay as yourselves, in a softer shape nestles against your side, the tribute called for by that is hearty pleasure of love. Enjoyment, I say, is the essence of love!"

At this, which falls upon all ears present with the effect of rank blasphemy, Biterolf rises in wrath. "Out, out, to fight against us all. Who could be silent hearing you? If your arrogance will vouchsafe to listen, hear, slanderer, me too! When high love inspires me, it steels my weapons with courage; to save it from indignity proudly would I pour forth my last blood. For the honour of women and of lofty virtue I unsheathe my knightly sword,—but that which your youth is pleased to call pleasure is cheap enough and worth no single blow!" The audience cheer him enthusiastically: "Hail, Biterolf, our good blade!" Tannhäuser can no longer contain himself. It is now again quite as it used to be, when never could he live at peace with these purbling tortoisés, dull of wit to the point of amazement, and yet pretending to pronounce

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

upon things, pass judgment upon others. What can there be but warfare forever between him and them? But that Biterolf, this war-worn, middle-aged, rugged minstrel should take it upon himself to instruct Heinrich Tannhäuser, pupil of Venus, in matters of love! His retort comes quick, from the shoulder, so to speak, though the form is not dropped of fitting his words to chords of the peaceful harp: "Ha, fond braggart, Biterolf! Is it you, singing about love, grim wolf? But you can hardly have meant that which I hold worthy to be enjoyed. What, you poverty-stricken wight—what pleasure of love may have fallen to your share? Not rich in love your life has been! And such joys as may have sprouted along your path, indeed, were hardly worthy of a blow!"—"Let him not be allowed to finish! Forbid his insolence!" cry the incensed nobles, who had suffered Biterolf's personal attack, but find insufferable this of the over-splendid, over-bearing, over-confident youth. Biterolf's sword has leaped from its scabbard. The Landgrave orders it back. "Preserve peace, you singers!"

A hush falls as Wolfram takes the floor again. He had sacrificed every selfish hope to serve both Elizabeth and Tannhäuser, had employed himself to further their union. What now is happening is plainly terrible to him. His opinion of the friend has undergone in the last moments a grievous subversion. He has been wounded to the soul by the bold and profane tone of Tannhäuser's argument. His sensibility detects an atmosphere of sin about this novel love's advocate, and as a good and pious knight he is forced to array himself against the friend, to uphold Ideal Love in antagonism to the Carnal Love he has just heard exalted. "Oh, Heaven, hear my prayer and consecrate my song!" he sings, a pale flame informing his song, as, imaginably, his cheek and eye; "Let me see evil banished

TANNHÄUSER

from this pure and noble circle! To you, Highest Love, let my song resound, inspired, to you that in angelic beauty have penetrated deep into my soul. As a messenger from Heaven do you appear to us; I follow from afar. You guide us toward the regions where immortally shines your star!"

Tannhäuser, exasperated, reckless, frenzied with that temperamental need of his to dominate, that impatience of being lessoned, losing sight of all but one thing, that it shall be proved to them they can teach nothing about love to him, the lover of the very Goddess of Love, seizes his harp, his sword in this duel, and breaks forth in his impassioned Praise of Venus,—the song we heard in the heart of her Hill, when he celebrated her at her own bidding, in conclusion begging so lamely for his dismissal. "To you, Goddess of Love, shall my song resound! Loud shall your praises now be sung by me! Your sweet beauty is the source of all that is beautiful, and every lovely miracle has its origin in you! He who aglow has enfolded you in his arms, he knows, and he alone, what love is! Oh, you poor-spirited, who have never tasted love, go,—to the Hill of Venus repair!"

The last words have the effect of a thunder-clap, in the consternation they produce. Tannhäuser in the drunkenness of his pride had forgotten what this revelation would mean in the ears he trumpeted it to; in his long sojourn in the pagan underworld, where his moral judgment had become dulled and perverted, had forgotten, apparently, how the Christian world regarded such commerce with it as his words betrayed. That mysterious Hörselberg looming in the distance was in popular thinking the very ante-chamber of Hell; its pleasures, paid in the world to come with eternal damnation, were rewarded in this world with excommunication and death. One who had frequented it was sin-polluted, sin-drenched, he poisoned the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

air with sin. All shrink back at his announcement as from a leper. The women flee precipitately from the contamination of his neighbourhood. It is like a flight of gorgeous birds. The men's instant and only thought is to immolate him, cleanse the earth of the inexpressible blot upon it that he is. "He has luxuriated in the pleasures of Hell! He has dwelled in the Hill of Venus! Abominable! Accursed! Bathe your swords in his blood! Hurl him back into the fiery lake!"

Tannhäuser stands with drawn sword facing their multitude. They are advancing toward him, his doom seems sealed,—when Elizabeth's body is found interposed shield-wise between him and their swords. Their hands are necessarily stayed. "What do we see?" their wondering question runs, "What? Elizabeth? The chaste virgin protecting the sinner?"—"Back!" the meek maiden commands with vigour enough at this pass, "or I shall not regard death! What are wounds from your swords beside the death-stroke I have received from him?" Tannhäuser starts like one awakening. He had not thought of this aspect of his action; the pride relaxes suddenly that had stiffened him. "Elizabeth!" her uncle argues with her, and the others add their voices to his, "What must I hear? How has your heart allowed itself to be stultified, that you should attempt to save from punishment the man who, added to all else, has so dreadfully betrayed you?"—"What does it matter about me?" she cries; "But he—his soul's salvation! Would you rob him of his soul's eternal salvation?" He has cast away all chance of that, they affirm; never can he gain salvation. The curse of Heaven is upon him, let him die in his sins! At their threatening approach, she spreads her arms resolutely before him. She towers tall and white, she speaks with strange authority. "Back from him! Not you are his judges! Cruel ones, cast from you the barbarous sword, and

TANNHÄUSER

give heed to the word of the stainless virgin! Learn through me what is the will of God. The unhappy man whom a potent dreadful enchantment holds bound, what, shall he never come to Heaven through repentance and expiation in this world? You who are so strong in the pure faith, do you apprehend so ill the mind of the Most High? Would you take away the hope of the sinner? State then what wrong he has done to you. Behold me, the maiden, whose blossom he shattered with a swift blow, me, who loved him to the depths of being, and whose heart he pierced with a jubilant laugh . . . I plead for him, I plead for his life! Let his feet be turned into the path of penitence. Let the courage be restored to him of the faith that for him too the Saviour died!" In a spasm of realisation and self-horror the unhappy Tannhäuser hides his face and sinks to the earth. The angry lords have calmed under the Princess's exhortation. They see in her an angel descended from Heaven to announce the holy will of God. Who could persist in violence after hearing the supplications of an angel?

Tannhäuser has come at last completely to himself, to a clear vision, by light of that heavenly goodness, of what he has been, what he has done. Sapped of its pride, his spirit grovels helplessly in the lowest depths of abasement. "To lead the sinner to salvation, the God-sent came to me, but I, alas, to touch her impiously, I lifted upon her eyes of vice. Oh, Thou, far above the vale of earth, who didst send to me this angel of salvation, have mercy upon me who, ah! so deeply steeped in sin, did such ignoble wrong to the mediatrix of Heaven!"

The Landgrave decides upon the course to be taken. An abominable crime has been committed; in hypocritical disguise the accursed son of sin has slipped into their midst. Among them he may not remain, the displeasure of Heaven already lowers upon this roof which too long has covered him.

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

One road is open to the sinner, which, while rejecting him, the Landgrave points out—let him take advantage of it to his welfare! Numerous bands of penitents are starting from this region on pilgrimage to Rome for the great Pardon. The older have left already; the younger are still gathering in the valley. Let Tannhäuser join them, go with them to the Holy City, fall upon his knees and do penance for his sin. Let him cast himself before him who speaks the decrees of God upon earth, entreat his blessing, and never return if he fail to obtain it. For if their vengeance stay its hand at the prayer of an angel, their swords will not fail to reach him if he continue in his sin. The chant comes wafted from the distance of those younger pilgrims gathering for departure: “At the great feast of peace and pardon, humbly confess your sins. Blessed is the firm in faith, he may be absolved through contrition and penance.”

A ray of hope illumines Tannhäuser's face. He starts up from his knees, and with a wild cry, “To Rome!” rushes forth from the Hall.

III

The story is taken up again when the valley all green and blossoming at our first sight of it has assumed melancholy autumn colours. Wolfram walking at sunset comes upon Elizabeth prostrate in prayer at the foot of the road-side shrine. He watches her with eyes of profoundest compassion. “Full well did I know that I should find her here, as so often I find her, when in lonely wandering I descend from the wooded heights to the valley. With death in her heart from the blow dealt to her by him, outstretched in burning anguish, night and day she prays—Oh, eternal strength of a holy love!—for his

TANNHÄUSER

redemption. She awaits the return of the pilgrims from Rome. Already the leaves are falling, their home-coming is at hand. Is he among the pardoned? That is her question, that her continual prayer. Oh, if her wound is such as cannot be healed, yet let alleviation be vouchsafed to it!"

The chant dawns upon the distance of the returning pilgrims. Elizabeth rises to her feet, wan and worn and frail. "It is their song,—they are coming home!" To steady her poor, agitated, failing heart, she calls upon the saints and prays them to instruct her in her part, that she may fulfil it worthily.

The band of pilgrims comes in sight; they pass, as earlier, in front of the image of Mary, lifting their voices in an anthem of solemn joy. Elizabeth looks into the face of every one of them as they pass. They have defiled before her to the last. He is not among them.

They wind their way out of sight, their last Halleluyah dies. Elizabeth falls at the Virgin's feet, and, with the fervour of one who is praying for very life, prays for death. "All-powerful Virgin, hear my prayer! To thee, favoured among women, I appeal! I bow in the dust before thee, oh, take me from this earth! Make me pure and like to an angel, fit to enter thy blessed kingdom. If ever, possessed by a fond insanity, my heart was turned from thee; if ever a sinful desire, a worldly longing, took root in me,—with a thousand pains I have striven to kill it in my heart. But if I cannot wholly atone for that fault, do thou mercifully condescend to me, that I may with humble salutation approach thee, made worthy to become thy servant,—only to implore thine intercession rich in grace for his sin, only to implore thine intercession for his sin!" She is very woman to her last breath, the saint. She has failed on earth to gain the coveted sign of pardon for him,—his not returning with the others can only mean that he is not among the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

pardoned; it means perhaps even that he did not accomplish the pilgrimage at all. . . . She renounces him before Heaven, as if by that sacrifice to propitiate the powers above, and desires to be given entrance through death to that higher court where she still may intercede for him,—perhaps, when she is an angel, with better effect. She rises from prayer with the appearance of one upon whom already the hand of death is laid. Wolfram, who notes her feeble step and bloodless cheek, whose faithful heart understands all, solicitous for her, asks if he may not escort her home. Without speaking, by gentle gesture and shake of the head she declines, and he watches her solitary figure slowly ascending the path toward the castle, until it has disappeared from sight.

A mortal sadness is upon him, but a sadness mild as his nature. This poet can at the darkest pass still turn his sorrows into song. With song he now tries to administer to his oppressed heart consolation. He feels softly along the strings of his harp. His thoughts are full of Elizabeth, his soul apprehends what journey her soul is preparing for. The terror of it, as well as the hope illumining the dark way, he sees symbolised in the surrounding darkening scene, over which now breaks the light of the evening star. “Like the premonition of death twilight envelops the land, enfolds the valley in a dusky garment. The soul, yearning for yonder heights, shrinks from the journey through night and terrors. Then do you appear, O loveliest among the stars! You shed your light afar. Your beloved beams cleave the nocturnal twilight, and benignly you show us the way out of the valley. . . . Oh, you, my sweetly-beaming evening star, whom I have ever greeted so gladly,—do you greet, when she rises past you, on her way from the vale of earth to become a blessed angel beyond the stars, do you greet her from the heart that has never failed in its truth to her!”

TANNHÄUSER

A long time he continues sitting in the twilight valley, gazing at the setting star, making his harp express the emotions he has not the heart any more to formulate with his lips. It grows night, the evening star goes out.

A shape in ragged pilgrim's-garb, supporting itself upon a pilgrim's-staff, as if walking were scarcely possible without, from terrible weariness, approaches the minstrel. "I heard harp-chords," the tottering wayfarer speaks to himself; "How mournful they sounded! Hardly might such music come from *her!*"—"Who are you, pilgrim, wandering thus alone?" Wolfram addresses the shadowy figure. "Who I am?" comes the reply, "And yet I know you well enough. You are Wolfram, that highly-accomplished minstrel!"—"Heinrich!" cries Wolfram, not to be mistaken in that mocking voice,—with the scorn of which is mingled so much wild bitterness that the hearer is made certain this pilgrim is returned under different conditions from all the rest. "Heinrich, you? . . . What brings you in this neighbourhood? Speak! Are you so bold as, unabsolved, to have let your feet take the road to this region?"—"Be without fear, my good minstrel, I am not come looking for you nor any of your tribe. But I am looking for one who shall show me the road . . . the road which of old I found so easily!"—"What road do you mean?"—"The road to the Hill of Venus!" Wolfram recoils. "Do you know that road?" persists Heinrich. "Madman! Horror seizes me to hear you!" the pious knight shudders; "Where have you been? Tell me, did you not go to Rome?"—"Speak not to me of Rome!"—"Were you not present at the holy festival?"—"Speak not of it to me!"—"Then you have not been? . . . Tell me, I conjure you!" The answer comes, after a dark pause, with an effect of boundless bitterness: "Aye, I too was in Rome!"—"Then speak! Tell me of it, unhappy man! I feel a vast compassion for you

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

surging within my breast!" Tannhäuser in the nigh darkness regards him for a moment with astonishment; he speaks more gently, moved in spite of himself by such gentleness. "What is that you say, Wolfram? Are you not my enemy?"—"Never was I such—while I believed you pure of purpose! But speak, you went on the pilgrimage to Rome?"—"Well, then,—listen! You, Wolfram, shall hear all." Exhausted he drops on a projection of rock, but when Wolfram would seat himself beside him he waives him violently off. "Do not come near me! The place where I rest is accursed! . . . Hear, then, Wolfram, hear!" He had started, he relates, on his pilgrimage to Rome with such passion of repentance in his heart as never penitent felt before. An angel had shattered in him the pride of sin. For that angel's sake he would do penance with the last humility, seek the salvation he had forfeited,—that the tears might be sweetened which angelic eyes had shed for him, sinner. The devotions, austerities, self-castigations of the other pilgrims had seemed to him all too light. When they trod the greensward, he chose flints and thorns; when they refreshed themselves at roadside springs, he absorbed instead the thirst-breeding heat of the sun; when they but prayed, he shed his blood to the praise of the Most High; when they turned into the shelter of Alpine sanctuaries, he made ice and snow his bed; with closed eyes—climax of self-denial!—with closed eyes, that he might not behold the wonder of them, he passed unseeing through the lovely plains of Italy! All this because he wished to atone to the point of self-annihilation, that the tears might be sweetened of his angel. He had reached Rome, he had bowed praying upon the threshold of the holy place. Day had dawned, bells were pealing, heavenly anthems resounding. Then he through whom God manifests Himself to man had passed through the kneeling crowd. He had given absolution,

TANNHÄUSER

had promised grace, to thousands; thousands he had sent away rejoicing. Tannhäuser had approached him, had knelt in the dust, had confessed the evil joys he had known, the terrible craving which no self-mortification had availed yet to quiet; he had cried to him, in agony, for deliverance from these burning fetters. And the one thus appealed to had pronounced: "If you have shared in such evil pleasure, inflamed yourself at the fire of Hell, if you have sojourned in the Hill of Venus, to all eternity you are damned! Even as the staff in my hand can never more clothe itself with fresh green, even so can never out of the conflagration of Hell redemption blossom for you!" The pilgrim thus addressed had sunk to the earth, annihilated. Consciousness had forsaken him. When he awoke, it was night in the deserted square. Sounds came from the distance of happy hymns of thanksgiving. A passion of disgust had seized him for the pious songs; an icy horror of their lying promises of redemption. With wild steps he had fled,—drawn back to the place where such great joys, such ineffable delight, he had found of old upon *her* warm breast. "To you, Venus, Lady,"—he cries out in a frenzy of loathing for what lies behind, and of longing to escape, "to you I am come back!—come back to your lovely night of enchantment! Descend will I to your court, where your beauty shall shine upon me forevermore!" Wolfram tries vainly to stop him. He will not be stopped,—all the more ardently he calls: "Oh, let me not seek in vain! How easily once did I find my way to you! You have heard that men curse me; now, sweetest goddess, guide me to yourself! . . . Ha!" he cries, in a moment, to Wolfram wrestling all unheeded to turn him from his deadly purpose, "Ha, do you not feel soft gusts of air? . . . Do you not smell exquisite odours? . . . Do you not hear jubilant music?" Rosy vapours are rolling near; dancing forms define themselves in the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

soft increasing glow. Tannhäuser madly calls them to him, while struggling to release himself from Wolfram's obstinate hold. "It is the dancing rout of the nymphs! Come hither! Come hither, to pleasure and delight! Oh, enchantment pervades all my senses, at beholding once more that rosy light of dawn! It is the magic realm of love, we are entering into the Hill of Venus!"—"Woe!" shudders Wolfram; "It is evil sorcery unfolding its insidious snares! It is Hell approaching at mad career!"

The radiant form of Venus appears in the midst of the rosy atmosphere, Venus holding out to the recreant knight her perfect arms. "Welcome, faithless man! Has the world condemned and rejected you? And do you, finding no mercy anywhere, come seeking love now in my arms?" Wolfram speaks exorcisms rapid and vigorous as he can, while Tannhäuser stretches his hands toward the soft vision: "Oh, Venus, Lady, rich in forbearance! To you, to you I come!" With tenderest smiles she holds forth forgiveness. "Since you are returned to my threshold, your revolt shall be condoned. The well of joy shall gush for you forever, never shall you go from me again!" With the desperate cry: "All hope of Heaven is lost to me, I choose therefore the pleasures of Hell!" Tannhäuser tears himself free from Wolfram. Wolfram seizes him again, calling upon the help of the Almighty, not to be thrown off. The battle over Tannhäuser is hot between Wolfram and Venus, this one calling him to her, that one physically holding him back, while the insensate man orders him off, tries to loose himself and rush to her. "Heinrich, one word—" Wolfram makes the last appeal; "One word and you are free! Oh, sinner though you be, you shall yet be saved. An angel prayed for you on earth; ere long, shedding benedictions, she will hover above you . . . Elizabeth!"

Tannhäuser had violently wrested himself from Wolfram, but

TANNHÄUSER

the name roots him to the spot. "Elizabeth!" It is as if to reach Venus now he must first thrust her aside. The spell of that name changes in an instant the current of his being; fills his eyes with a memory that blots out the riot of rose-faces and golden hair toward which all his desire had pitched him.

Moving torches spot the darkness of the road winding down from the Wartburg; voices are heard approaching, chanting a dirge. "Peace to the soul" the words come floating, "just escaped from the clay of the saintly sufferer!" Wolfram understands but to well. "Your angel pleads for you now before the throne of God. Her prayer is heard. Heinrich, you are saved!" With a cry of "Woe! Lost to me!" the apparition vanishes of Venus and her train; the hill-side mysteriously engulfs them.

The torches flicker nearer, the singing becomes louder. "Do you hear it?" Wolfram asks of Tannhäuser, who stands transfixed, corpse-like still and pale and staring. "I hear it!" he murmurs in a dying voice.

The funeral train, pilgrims, nobles, minstrels, Landgrave, descend into the valley chanting their requiem. At a motion of Wolfram's they set down the uncovered bier at the foot of the Virgin's shrine. In the torch-light they recognise the unhappy Tannhäuser. Seized with pity at sight of his ravaged countenance, "Holy," they sing, "the pure one who now united to the host of Heaven stands before the Eternal. Blessed the sinner over whom she wept, for whom she now implores the salvation of Heaven!"

She lies outstretched, still and serene, all white beneath her white pall. She has saved him, after all,—by dying. Her dead body has barred his way back to Venus. The infinitely-tired and worn pilgrim, destroyed by the violence of his passions good and bad, with faltering steps,—helped, in the faintness of death upon him, by Wolfram,—approaches the white

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

bier. He sinks down beside it, giving up his proud soul in the so humble prayer: "Sainted Elizabeth, pray for me!"

And behold, a second band of pilgrims arriving from the Holy City announce a miracle: The dry staff in the Pope's hand, which he had declared should sooner return to bloom than so black a sinner be forgiven, had in the night burst into leaf and blossom; and order had gone forth to proclaim the sign through all lands, that the forgiven sinner should learn of it. The company lift their voices in awe and exaltation: "Salvation and grace have been granted to the sinner! He has entered into the peace of the blessed!"

The warfare between soul and sense is presented by Wagner with singular fairness. The pilgrims' song is very beautiful, and beautiful is all the music of good in the opera of *Tannhäuser*. The Venus-music is certainly equally beautiful; perhaps, to the superficial ear, is a little more beautiful still: the goddess's own Call, penetrating, wonderful; the well-nigh irresistible song of the Sirens. The Bacchic dance, which stands we suppose for the animal element in love, the Satyr part in man, is hardly beautiful; yet the love-music as a whole, we can concede without difficulty, carries it over the sacred music in beauty of a sort, even as the goddess would have carried off the palm of beauty over the saint. The power of the music of good, as Wagner lets us see, lies just in the fact that it is good; the final victory of the saint in the fact that she is a saint, and that from a mysterious eternal bias of human nature man finally must prefer good. He has a soul, he cannot help himself; that, as we have seen, is the secret reason why Venus cannot forever completely content him, why the pale hand of the saint, beckoning him at the end of a penitential pilgrimage diversified with every sort of suffering, draws him still on and upward.

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

I

A DUTCH sea-captain, so long before the date of the play that his story at the time of it is an old legend, finding himself baffled during a storm in his effort to double certain cape, swore a great oath that he would persist to the end of time. The Devil heard him and took him at his word. He was doomed eternally to sail the seas. But an angel of the Lord interposed, and obtained for him a condition of release: Every seven years he might land and woo a woman; if he could find one to love him faithfully until death, the curse upon him would be defeated, he would be saved.

The Overture paints a great storm at sea, and contrasts the two ships that are drawing toward the same bay of refuge in the coast, the phantom ship with its crew of ghosts and their sinister sea-cry, the common substantial other craft with its comfortable flesh-and-blood sailors.

As the curtain rises upon the turbulent sea and black weather, the Norwegian vessel has got safely within the haven. While the sailors furl sails, cast cables, the captain, Daland, comes ashore and climbs upon a rock to study the landscape. He recognises the spot, seven miles from the harbour of home where his daughter Senta awaits his return, whom he had thought by this hour to be clasping in his arms. "But he who counts upon the wind," he philosophises, "is counting upon the mercy of Satan!" There is nothing to do but wait until the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

storm subsides. He returns on board, sends the tired crew below to rest after their long struggle with the storm, leaves the watch to the mate, and himself retires to the cabin. The mate, alone on deck, after going the round, seats himself at the helm. The violence of the storm has somewhat diminished, the sky has lightened. To keep awake, he sings,—a love-song, ingenuous as sailors are; which does not however fulfil its purpose, for the singer, more and more oppressed with drowsiness, drops off before the last bar.

The storm once more gathers force, the sky darkens. A ship appears in the distance, with blood-red sails and black masts. It rapidly nears shore and noiselessly turns into the bay beside Daland's. The anchor drops with a crash. The Norwegian mate starts, but, half-blind with sleep, discerning nothing to take alarm at, drops off again. Without a sound the crew of the strange ship furl their sails and coil their ropes. The captain, singularly pale, black-bearded, in a black Spanish costume of long-past fashion, lands alone. It is he whom ballads call the Flying Dutchman. Seven years have passed since he last touched land. His opportunity has returned to reach out for salvation. He comes ashore wearily, perfunctorily, without hope, or doubt but that the ocean will soon be receiving him back for continued desperate wanderings. "Your cruelty, proud ocean," he apostrophises it, "is variable, but my torment eternal! The salvation which I seek on land, never shall I find it. To you, floods of the boundless main, I shall be found faithful until your last wave break and your last moisture dry!

"How often—" he cries, as in fixed despair he gazes back over the past, "How often, filled with longing to die have I cast myself into the deepest abysses of the sea, but death, alas! I could not find! Against the reefs where ships find dreadful

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

burial I have driven my ship, but it found no grave! Inciting him to rage, I have defied the pirate—I hoped to meet with death in fierce battle. ‘Here,’ I have cried, ‘show your prowess! Full of treasure are ship and boat! But the wild son of the sea trembling hoisted the sign of the cross and fled. Nowhere a grave! Never to die! Such is the dreadful sentence of damnation. Oh, tell me, gentle angel of God’s, who won for me the possibility of salvation, was I, wretch, the toy of your mockery when you showed me the means of redemption? Vain hope! Fearful, idle illusion! There is no such thing more upon earth as eternal fidelity, One hope alone is left me, one hope alone which nothing can destroy. However long the seed of earth endure, it must come to final dissolution. Day of Judgment, end of the world! When shall you dawn upon my night? When shall it sound, the trump of doom, at which the earth will crumble away? When all the dead arise, then shall I pass into nothingness. O ye worlds, a term to your course! Eternal void, receive me!” From the hold of the phantom-ship the unseen crew echo his prayer: “Eternal void, receive us!”

He is leaning against a rock, absorbed in sombre meditation, when Daland, emerging from the cabin to take a look at the weather, becomes aware of the looming neighbour. He rouses the sleep-drunken mate. The latter, shocked wide-awake by the conviction of negligence, catches up a speaking-trumpet and calls to the strange ship lying at anchor close by, “Who is there?” There comes no sound in reply, save from the echo. “Answer!” shouts the mate; “Your name and colours!” Silence, as before. “It appears they are quite as lazy as we!” Daland remarks, finding nothing particularly noteworthy in the unresponse, since his own crew are asleep too after their long toil. Catching sight of the dark figure on shore which he

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

rightly takes to be the captain, he prevents the mate's further investigation, and turns his questions to this one: "Halloo, seaman! Give your name! Your country?" The answer comes after a long pause, almost as if the speaker had lost the habit of human intercourse and uttered himself with difficulty. "I have come from afar. Do you, in such stress of weather, deny me anchorage?"—"God forbid! The seaman knows the friendly courtesies of hospitality!" cries Daland. Joining the stranger ashore, "Who are you?" he asks. "Hollander."—"God be with you! So you too were driven by the hurricane on to the bare rocky coast? I had no better fate. My home is but a few miles from here; I had nearly reached it when I was forced to turn and sail away. Tell me, whence are you come? Has your ship sustained damage?"—"My ship is strong, nor likely to meet with damage," the Hollander answers, as drearily as mysteriously; "Driven by storms and adverse winds I have been wandering over the face of the waters—how long? I hardly could tell. I have long ceased to count the years. I hardly could name all the lands I have approached. One land alone, the one which of all I long for, I can never find,—the land of home! Grant me for a short period the hospitality of your house, and you shall not rue the act of friendliness. My ship is richly laden with treasures from every region and latitude. If you will traffic with me, you may be sure of your advantage."—"How wonderful!" says Daland, impressed; "Am I to take you at your word? An evil star, it would seem, has so far pursued you. I am ready to do what I can to serve you. But—may I ask what is the cargo of your ship?" The Hollander makes a sign to the watch. His sailors bring ashore a chest. "The rarest treasures you shall see, precious pearls and noblest gems," the stranger speaks to the wide-eyed Daland. "See for yourself, and be convinced of the value

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

of the price I offer for the hospitality of your roof." The lid of the chest is lifted. Daland stares amazed at the contents. "What? Is it possible? These treasures?—But who is so rich as to have an equivalent to tender?"—"Equivalent? I have told you—I offer this for a single night's lodging. What you see, however, is an insignificant portion of that which the hold of my ship contains. Of what avail to me is the treasure? I have neither wife nor child, and my home I can never find. All my riches I will give you, if you will afford me a home with you and yours." Daland cannot believe that he hears aright. "Have you a daughter?" inquires the Hollander. "I have, indeed, a most dear child."—"Let her be my wife!" Again Daland cannot believe his ears, cannot be sure whether he is asleep or awake. It is suggested later that he cares unduly for wealth; but, without supposing him avaricious, we can realise how what is offered at this moment should seem such to his simple sailor mind that a man must be outright mad not to grasp at it for the inconceivable happiness and splendour of himself and house. No flesh-and-blood girl, no daughter of the common fellow he is, can to his mind be a reasonable equivalent, really, for the mass of riches proposed in exchange for her. Daland nor she had probably in all their lives owned a precious stone. And this chest is full to the brim of jewels, and that ship contains more still a hundred-fold, and the man asking for his daughter's hand is clearly a hypochondriac, infinitely sea-weary, who sees in the prospect of home and settled life the whole desire of his heart, cloyed with riches and sick of wandering. If he, Daland, should hesitate, the suitor might change his mind. As for the daughter, she will either see the thing as he sees it,—how could human woman see it differently?—or, dutiful, will be ruled by his superior wisdom. "Indeed, stranger, I have a lovely daughter,

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

devoted to me with the most faithful filial love. She is my pride, my highest wealth, my comfort in evil days, my joy in good.”—“May her love,” the Hollander exclaims with feeling, “never fail her father! True to him, she will be true likewise to her husband.”—“You give jewels, priceless pearls,” remarks Daland, with an attempt at dignity that does his self-respect good, no doubt, without greatly impressing us, “but the greatest treasure of all is a faithful wife!”—“And you will give me such a one?”—“You have my word. Your fate moves my sympathy. Freehanded as you are, you give assurance of magnanimity and high-mindedness. The like of you I have ever wished for son-in-law, and even were your fortune not so great, I would choose no other.”—“My thanks. And shall I see the daughter this very day?”—“The next favourable wind will take us home. You shall see her, and if she pleases you . . .” —“She shall be my wife.—Will she prove to be my angel?” he sighs aside; “Do I still permit myself the folly of an illusion that an angel’s heart will pity me? Hopeless as I am, I yet follow the lure of hope!”

“The wind is propitious, the sea is calm. We will heave anchor at once, and speedily reach home,” says Daland. “If I may beg,—do you sail ahead,” the Hollander suggests. “The wind is fresh, but my crew is spent. I will let them rest awhile and then will follow.”—“But our wind?”—“Will continue for some time blowing from the south. My ship is swift and will surely overtake yours.”—“You believe so? Very well! Let it be as you wish. Farewell, and may you meet my child before the end of day!” The sailors have lifted the anchor and set the sails. Daland goes on board. With the crew singing cheerily together, the Norwegian ship starts upon the homeward course. The Hollander returns to his silent deck.

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

II

The scene is next laid in the interior of Daland's house, the large living-room, where a flock of girls sit around the fire with their spinning-wheels. Beside the maps and pictures of nautical interest forming the natural decoration of a sea-captain's house, there hangs on the wall the picture of a pale black-bearded man, dressed in the Spanish fashion of years long gone.

The girls are spinning busily, singing while they work. They are the sweethearts of the lads on Daland's ship, and their song is of sailors at sea who are thinking of maidens at home, and if diligent turning of the spinning-wheel might influence the wind—oh, but they would speedily be back in harbour!

One only of the young girls in the room is not working; Senta, letting her wheel stand idle, leans back abstractedly in a great armchair, with her eyes fixed upon the picture of the pale man. Her old nurse, Mary, who spins diligently herself and keeps the rest at their task, chides her, not very severely, for her idleness. The girls in their song have been felicitating themselves that if they are zealous at their spinning their lovers will give them the golden earnings they bring home from the south. "You naughty child," Mary says to Senta, at the end of the song, "if you do not spin, you will receive no present from your *Schatz!*" Senta's companions laugh at this. "There is no need for her to hurry. Her sweetheart is not out at sea. He brings home no gold, he brings home game. Every one knows in what the fortune of a huntsman consists!" Senta does not stir; it is doubtful if she have heard. Without removing her eyes from the picture of the pallid man, she hums softly to herself certain fragment of old ballad. "Look at

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

her!" the nurse takes fuller account of her attitude and abstraction; "Look at her! Always in front of that picture! Do you intend to dream away your whole young life before that portrait?" Senta answers gently, still without taking her eyes from the pale face: "Why did you tell me who he is, and relate his story? . . . The unhappy soul!" At the heavily burdened sigh upon which she utters the last words, "God have you in His care!" exclaims Mary, vaguely troubled. But the girls, who are in merry mood, laugh again. "Why, why, what is that we hear? She sighs for the pale man! There you see what a picture can do. She is in love. Please Heaven no mischief result! Erik is somewhat hot of temper. Please God he do no damage! Say not a word, else, aflame with wrath, he may shoot the rival from the wall!" Their chatter finally reaching her consciousness, Senta turns to them, annoyed. "Oh, keep still! Stop your silly laughing! Do you wish to make me really cross?" Further to tease her, they drown her voice with the refrain of their spinning-song: "Mutter and hum, good little wheel, cheerily, cheerily turn! Spin, spin a thousand threads, good little wheel, mutter and hum!"—"Do stop that foolish song," begs Senta, "my ears are dazed with your muttering and humming. If you wish me to attend, find something better to do!"—"Very well," say the girls, "then sing yourself!" As a bird to the nest, Senta returns to the subject engrossing her mind. "Hear what I suggest: let Mary sing us the ballad." All understand what ballad is meant. "God forbid!" cries the nurse; "It is likely I will do it! Children, let the Flying Dutchman rest!"—"Yet how often have I heard the ballad from you!" sighs Senta; and, as the nurse continues obdurate, "I will sing it myself," she decides, "and do you girls listen. Could I but bring home to your hearts the wretchedness of the poor soul's fate, it could

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

not fail to move you to compassion!" The girls accept the offer with delight, push aside their spinning-wheels and gather around the singer. Only the old nurse, whose instinct has somehow caught alarm, and who has conceived a curious dislike and fear of this pallid hero of legend, refuses her countenance and testily goes on spinning by herself in the chimney-corner.

"Have you met the ship on the seas," sings Senta, "blood-red of sail and black of mast? Upon the high deck, the pale man, the ship's master, keeps incessant watch.—Hui! How the wind blows! Yohohey!—Hui! How it sings in the stays! Yohohey!—Hui! Like an arrow flies the ship, without stop, without rest! Yet might deliverance one day come to the pale man, could he find a woman upon earth who should love him faithfully until death. Oh, when, pale sea-farer, when shall you find her? Pray to Heaven that a woman soon may keep her troth to him!

"With contrary wind, in the rage of the storm, he determined to double a cape. He cursed and swore in mad mood: 'Not to all eternity will I desist!'—Hui! And Satan heard it. Yohohey!—Hui! Took him at his word. Yohohey!—Hui! And now, a lost soul, he sails the seas, without stop, without rest. How the unhappy man, however, might find deliverance upon earth, an angel of the Lord showed him,—how he might earn eventual salvation. Oh, that you might, pale sea-farer, find it! Pray to Heaven that a woman soon may keep her troth to him!

"He casts anchor every seven years, and to woo a woman comes ashore. But never yet has he found a faithful one.—Hui! Spread the sails! Yohohey!—Hui! Lift the anchor! Yohohey!—Hui! False love, false troth! Back to sea, without stop, without rest! . . ." Senta who has been singing

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

with a spirit and expressiveness full unusual as applied to a threadbare old ballad, has at this point reached such a pitch of emotion that her voice fails and she sinks in her chair exhausted. The girls, whom her earnestness has impressed into a realisation of the facts sung by her, who have for a moment had through her eyes the vision of that lost soul's wretchedness, take up the ballad where she drops it, and sing on in tones which confess the contagion of her sympathy: "Ah, where tarries she, to whom God's angel might guide you? Where shall you find her who will be your own true and loyal love until death?" With an air of illumination, Senta starts to her feet and finishes the song with words which rise inspired to her lips: "Let me be that woman! My truth shall work your deliverance! God's angel guide you to me! Through me you shall reach salvation!" She speaks so passionately, appears so strangely, that her companions feel a sort of puzzled alarm. The old nurse, frightened, rushes to her side with the cry: "Heaven help us!" and all together they try to bring her to her normal self, calling in tones of protest, "Senta! Senta!"

Unnoticed of the rest, Erik, the huntsman, has during the last moments been standing in the doorway. He has heard Senta's exclamation, witnessed her strange condition, and affected by it differently from all the others cries, heart-struck, "Senta, Senta, are you determined to destroy me?"—"Oh, help us, Erik," the others appeal to him; "She is out of her senses!" The nurse, who has felt her blood unaccountably running chill, turns angrily to the picture on the wall: "Abominable picture, out of the house you shall go just as soon as the father comes home!"—"The father has arrived," Erik informs them; "From the cliff I saw his ship come in." All minds veer promptly from the subject which had been engrossing them, to this delightful one of the arrival. The girls are for running

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

to the harbour upon the instant. Mary prevents them. "Stop! Stop! You shall remain quietly at home. The sailor-folk will be arriving with hollow stomachs. To the kitchen and cellar! No time to waste! Let curiosity torment you as it may, first of all go and do your duty!" She drives them before her from the room, and follows.

Senta is going, too, but Erik bars the way, pleading, "Stay, Senta, stay for a moment! Release me from this torture—or, if you will, destroy me quite!" She affects, as the simplest girl must, not to understand. "Erik, what is it?"—"Oh, Senta, speak, say what is to become of me! Your father is coming home. Before starting upon a new voyage, he is sure to wish to carry out what he so often has spoken of . . ."—"And what is that?"—"To give you a husband. My heart with its unchanging love, my humble fortune, my hunter's luck, these things being all I have to offer, will not your father repulse me? And if my heart breaks with its misery, tell me, Senta, who is there will speak a word for me?" He pleads warmly, young Erik; he is at that age and point in life when not to obtain the woman he has set his heart upon seems a calamity such as will extinguish the sun, make the rest of life worthless; when refusal signifies destruction, and he is not ashamed of this as a weakness, but proud of it as a strength, and uses it as the most pertinent argument, and feels no abjectness in confessing himself at the mercy of a girl, a toy in her frail hands. He is the only lover of this type in the Wagnerian assortment, and, it happens, the only one who fails. Senta, we are permitted to divine, had not always felt as removed from him as at this moment. It is but lately, no doubt, with the turning perhaps of her seventeenth year, at some fuller opening into womanhood, that her romantic dream has taken such possession of her, and his warm-blooded urgent love become some-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

thing to withdraw from, without clearly formulated reason, by an instinct. She tries now to silence him, to put him off with the excuse that she must hurry to her father. But he is not to be put off. To detain her, he reproaches. "You wish to avoid me!"—"I must go to the harbour!"—"You shrink from me?"—"Oh, let me go!"—"You shrink from the wound which yourself you made, the madness of love you inspired? Oh, you shall hear me in this hour, shall hear the last question I will ask. When my heart is breaking with anguish, will not Senta herself speak a word for me?" She applies herself then to quiet and comfort such evident suffering; he is after all flesh-and-blood and close at hand, the other a dream. Her sentiments besides are not very clear even to herself. "Do you doubt my heart?" she asks reassuringly; "Do you doubt that it is full of kindness toward you? What is it, tell me, makes you so unhappy? What suspicion darkens your mind?"—"Oh, your father's heart is set upon riches. And you, Senta, how should I count upon you? Do you ever grant one of my requests? Do you not daily hurt and afflict my heart?"—"Afflict your heart? . . ." she asks in wonder. "What am I to think?" he goes on to show the jealous core of his unhappiness; "That picture . . ."—"What picture? . . ."—"Will you renounce your extravagant imaginings?"—"Can I keep from my face the compassion I feel?"—"And that ballad . . . you sang it again to-day."—"I am a child," she excuses herself, "and sing I know not what! Are you afraid of a song, a picture?"—"You are so pale!" he replies, studying her face dubiously; "Tell me, have I no reason to be afraid?"—"Should I not be moved by the terrible doom of that unhappiest man?"—"But my sufferings, Senta, do they no longer move you?"—"Oh, vaunt not your sufferings!" she cries, almost impatiently; "What can your sufferings be? Do you know what the fate

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

is of that poor soul?" She draws him before the picture, and while indicating it to him gazes raptly at it herself; "Can you not feel the woe, the inexpressible deep misery in the eyes which he turns upon me? Oh, the calamity which robbed him eternally of rest, the sense of it pierces my heart!" Veritable alarm seizes Erik at the earnestness she exhibits, an alarm to something more vital even than his alert jealousy, a terrible fear for her as apart from himself. "Woe's me!" he exclaims, "I am reminded of my ill-boding dream! God have you in his care, Satan has cast his toils about you!"—"What frightens you so?" she asks wearily. It is as if excess of emotion had brought on an immense fatigue; she sinks exhausted in the grand-sire's chair. "Let me tell you of it, Senta. It is a dream, hear and be warned by it." She leans back with closed eyes, and as he narrates it is as if having fallen asleep she saw in dream what he describes. "Upon the high cliff I lay dreaming. Beneath me I saw the expanse of the sea; I could hear the surf where it breaks foaming against the beach. I espied a foreign ship close to shore, a strange ship, extraordinary. Two men drew toward land. One of them, I saw it, was your father."—"And the other?" she asks, like a somnambulist, without opening her eyes. "I recognised him well enough, with his black doublet and pale face. . . ."—"And his mournful glance. . . ." she adds, still with closed eyes. Erik points at the picture: "The sea-man there."—"And I? . . ." she asks. "You came out of the house. You ran to meet your father. But hardly had you reached the pair, when you cast yourself at the feet of the stranger. I saw you clasp his knees. . . ." "He lifted me. . . ."—"To his breast. Passionately you clung to him, and kissed him ardently. . . ."—"And then?" He gazes at her with a sort of terror, as at something unnatural, in her appearance of sleep. "I saw you fly together over the

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

sea." She seems to wake with a start. "He is looking for me!" she cries in tones of extraordinary conviction, "I shall see him! My destiny it is to perish with him!" Erik recoils: "Horrible! Ha, I see it full plainly at last, she is gone from me! My dream boded true!" In uncontrollable despair he flees from the house. Senta, her excitement gradually dying, remains gazing at the picture. She is murmuring softly to herself the burden of the ballad: "Ah, may you, pale sea-farer, find her! Pray to Heaven that a woman soon may keep her troth to him!"—when the door opens and Daland and the Hollander appear at the threshold. Senta's eyes turn from the picture to the stranger entering. A cry escapes her lips and her eyes fasten on his face. His eyes, too, as he slowly steps into the room, bend steadfastly upon hers. They gaze as if the same spell had fallen upon both.

The father, after a moment watching from the doorway, waiting for his daughter to run as usual to greet him, speaks, not altogether displeased: "My child, you see me standing at the door, and, what is this? No embrace? No kiss? You stand in your place as if bewitched? Do I deserve, Senta, such a welcome?"—"God be with you!" she murmurs faintly, and, as he comes nearer, asks underbreath, without removing her eyes from the figure—the counterpart of the picture on the wall, "Father, speak, who is the stranger?" The father smiles: "You are eager to know? My child, give kind welcome to the stranger. A sea-man he is, like myself, and solicits our hospitality. Homeless for long years, incessantly bound on long voyages, in far-off lands he has gathered vast treasures. An exile from home, he offers rich compensation for a place at the fireside. Speak, Senta, should you be sorry that the stranger should dwell with us?" To the Hollander, while the daughter without a word's reply continues in her fixed contemplation

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

of his face, he speaks aside: "Tell me, did I praise her too highly? Now you see her in person, does she rightly please you? Must I add more still to my overflowing praise? Confess that she is an ornament to her sex!" The Hollander answers by an expressive gesture, his eyes fast all the while upon the maiden's face. The father turns anew to the daughter, and, without further preamble: "My child, let it please you to show favour to this man. He requests a goodly gift from your heart. Reach him your hand, for he shall be your bridegroom. If you are of a like mind with your father, to-morrow he shall be your husband." She shrinks, painfully, at this bluntness and precipitancy. The father, not noticing, unpockets jewels to show her. "Look at this circlet, behold these clasps. The sum of his possessions makes these the merest trifle. How, my precious child, should you not care for them? And it will all be yours for the exchanging of rings with him. But . . . neither of you speaks. . . ." He looks at them in turn. They have neither heeded nor heard, they are lost in contemplation of each other. "Am I in the way?" They do not hear that either. "I clearly am," he says to himself. "The best will be to leave them alone together." With a parting private word to the daughter: "May you win this noble man! Believe me, such good fortune is not common!" and to the Dutchman: "I leave you to yourselves, and betake myself away. Believe me, fair as she is, she is no less true than fair!" he discreetly withdraws.

The strange predestined lovers stand for long moments steadily gazing at each other, almost unconsciously, without motion to draw nearer—or further apart. Each of them voices his thoughts, not speaking to the other, but, dreamily, to himself. He murmurs: "As if out of the distance of long-past days speaks to me the semblance of this maiden. Even

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

such as through dread eternities I dreamed her, I behold her now here before my eyes. From the black depths of my night I too have ventured to raise my longing eyes upon a woman. Satan's malice left me a living heart, alas, that I might never lose consciousness of my torment. The sullen glow which I feel burning in my breast, should I, unhappy man, call it love? Ah, no, the longing it is for redemption! Oh, might redemption be my portion through such an angel as she is!" And she speaks, to herself, half-aloud: "Have I sunk into a wonderful dream? Is this which I see an illusion? Or have I until this moment lived in a world of dream, and is this the day of awakening? He stands before me, his features stamped with sorrow. His unparalleled sufferings silently call to me. Can the voice of deepest pity deceive? As I have so often beheld him he stands before me now. This sorrow which burns within my bosom, this going out of desire toward him, what must I call it? Oh, that the salvation which he goes seeking without rest might reach the unhappy man through me!"

He moves a little nearer to her at last, and asks with the simplicity and sincerity which befit the hour so fraught with fate, "Will you not reject your father's choice? That which he promised—what? shall it hold good? Could you forever give yourself to me? You could hold out your hand to the stranger? I might, after a life of torment, find in your truth the long craved-for peace?" She answers upon the instant, singularly sure of her heart: "Whoever you may be, and whatever ruin your cruel fate reserve for you, and whatever the destiny I thereby call upon myself, my obedient duty shall ever be to my father's wish."—"What, so unconditionally? My sorrows, is it possible, have moved you to such deep compassion?"—"Sorrows how measureless!" she exclaims to herself.

THE FYLING DUTCHMAN

"Oh, might I bring you consolation for those!" And he, overhearing: "Oh, gentlest sound through the warring darkness! An angel are you! The love of an angel can still the pain even of lost souls! If I may hope for salvation, Almighty, let it be through this angel!" But in the uplift of hope reviving, a remembrance gives him pause,—remembrance of the whole condition of his deliverance; and, a strain of solemnity mingling with his grateful tenderness, he warns her: "Could you apprehend the fate which, in belonging to me, with me you must share, you would pause to consider the sacrifice you bring in vowing to be true. Your youth would flee shuddering at prospect of the fate to which you would have doomed it, if the fairest virtues of womankind, if sacred fidelity and truth, be not yours." She replies with no less assurance than before, and her air of exalted inspiration: "Well do I know the high duties of woman. Be comforted, unhappy man! Let fate do justice of those who defy her decree. In my soul is written the supreme law of truth, and unto him to whom I pledge my faith this one truth it is which I give: Truth until death!"

Like balm the words fall upon his wounded spirit. The powers of darkness, it seems, are to be defeated; the evil star, it seems, has set and the star of hope arisen. "Ye angels," he calls to them, "who had quite forsaken me, confirm her heart in its constancy!" And she, her heavenly pity prays: "Let him have reached home at last! Let his ship rest here eternally in port!"

Daland re-enters. "By your leave, my people outside can hardly wait. Upon each home-coming, you must know, we hold a merry-making. I would fain add to the cheer of the feast, and am come, with that in mind, to ask if it might not be made into a betrothal feast?—As far as I see," he turns to the Hollander, "you have wooed to your heart's purpose?—And

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

you, my child," to Senta, "are you ready, too?" Senta with solemn resolution reaches her hand to the Dutchman. "Here is my hand, and here, never to repent it, I plight my troth until death!" The Hollander, taking her hand, cries defiance to the mockery of Hell through this fast truth of hers. At Daland's summons thereupon, "To the feast, and let every one to-day make merry!" the three turn to go and take share—even, incredibly, the Dutchman,—in legitimate human rejoicings.

III

Close by Daland's house lies the rock-bound bay into which his ship and the Dutchman's have come to anchor. The two crafts are seen in the clear night, lying at a short distance from each other, hard by the shore. The Norwegian is brightly illuminated, the sailors are on deck making holiday. The Hollander presents a striking contrast: not a light does it show, not a sound issues from it; it looms shadowy and forbidding.

"Steersman, leave the watch!" sing the roistering Norway lads; "Furl the sails! Anchor fast! Come along, steersman! No wind is there to fear nor adverse coast, and we mean to be right jolly. Each of us has a sweetheart on shore, excellent tobacco and superior brandy-wine. Rocks and storms are far outside, we laugh at rocks and storms! Steersman, come and drink!" They dance on deck, marking time with their heavy boots.

From Daland's house comes the bevy of girls we know, laden with generous baskets of food and drink. Finding their sweethearts so merrily employed, "Just look at them!" they say; "As we live, they are dancing! The ladies do certainly

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

seem superfluous!" With a playful feint of pique they pass without further notice the lighted, noisy ship, and go toward the Hollander, whose blood-tinted sails and black masts form but a grim silhouette against the star-sown sky. "Hi, girls,—stop! Where are you going?" the simple-minded sailors cry after them. But the girls do not abandon their small vengeance of serving the strangers first. "You have a mind to fresh wine, have you not? And is not your neighbour to have something too? Are the liquor and the feast to be solely for you?" The young mate rises to the occasion and has a fling at these suddenly-instituted rivals: "Indeed, indeed, take something, do, to the poor lads. They appear to be quite faint with thirst!" All turn their attention squarely now to the foreign ship and take account of the strangeness of its conditions. "Not a sound on board! And see, not a light! No sign of the crew!"—"Halloo, sea-folk!" the maidens shout, "Halloo! Do you need lights? Where are you? We cannot see. . . ."—"Don't wake them," chaff the Norwegians, "they are still asleep!" The girls go close to the ship and shout again. "Halloo, sea-folk! Halloo, answer!" There is a long silence. The sailor-lads have the laugh now on the girls. "Ha, ha! In very truth, they are dead. They are in no need of food and drink." But the girls will not accept their defeat. "What?" they continue calling to the invisible Dutch crew; "Are you so lazy as to have gone already to bed? Is it not holiday-time for you, too?"—"They lie fast in their lairs," jest the Norwegians; "like dragons they guard their treasure!"—"Halloo, sea-folk!" persist the girls; "Do you not wish for golden wine? Surely you are thirsty?"—"They do not care to drink, they do not care to sing," the sailor-lads tease; "there is no light burning in all their ship!"—"Say," the girls continue addressing the unresponding crew, "have you

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

no sweethearts on land? Do you not wish to come and dance on the friendly shore?"—"They are already old, they are pale instead of ruddy," put in the sailors, "and their sweethearts, they are dead!"—"Halloo!" the girls call louder, "Sea-folk, wake up! We are bringing you food and drink to heart's content!" The sailors good-humouredly unite in chorus: "They are bringing you food and drink to heart's content!" Another long pause, unbroken by the faintest sound from the Dutch ship. The girls are becoming uneasy. "It is a fact," they speak lower, struck; "They seem to be all dead. They do not need food and drink." But the boys feel jollier than ever. "You have heard of the Flying Dutchman," they cry, by way of wild joke; "His ship, big as life and true to life, you behold there!"—"Then don't wake the crew!" say the girls; "They are ghosts, we could swear!" The sailor-lads take their turn now shouting questions, humourously intended, at the sombre hull: "How many hundreds of years have you already been at sea? Storm and rocks have no terrors for you! Have you no letters, no commissions for shore? We will see that they come to our great-great-grandfathers' hands!" In the extravagance of fun, finally, raising their voices to the very loudest, "Halloo, sea-folk!" they cry; "Spread your sails! Give us a specimen of the Flying Dutchman's speed!" At the prolonged silence following, the girls shrink away, at last really frightened. "They do not hear. It makes our flesh creep. They do not want anything. Why do we continue to call?"—"That is it, you girls," the sailors heartily agree, "let the dead rest in peace! And let us who are alive be happy!" The girls hand up to them the savoury baskets. "There, take, since your neighbours disdain it."—"But what? Are you not coming on board yourselves?" inquire the sailors, when the girls do not as expected follow. It is early still;

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

they will return a little later, they promise, Till then let the boys drink and dance, but be careful not to disturb the repose of their weary neighbours!

When the girls have returned to the house, the sailors open the hampers and lustily fall to, casting playful thanks to those dumb neighbours for this double share of victuals and wine. In the lightness of their hearts they sing, and to the verses of their rollicking "Steersman, leave the watch!" clash their goblets noisily together.

Absorbed in their carousal, they have not remarked a beginning of movement on the ship close by and in the water immediately around it. This rises and falls in a mysterious violent swell, which rocks the awakening ship, while the rest of the sea is calm. Storm-wind whistles and howls among the rigging, though the night elsewhere is still and bright. Livid fire flares up in the place of the watch-light, bringing into distinctness the black cordage and spectral crew. The latter seem to come to life in the weird illumination, and with hollow voices suddenly entone a sea-song of strange intervals and cadences, disquieting to ears of warm flesh and blood. "Yohohey! Yohohey!—Huissa! The storm drives us to land! —Huissa! Sail in! Anchor loose!—Huissa! Run into the bay!—Black captain, go ashore! Seven years are over, sue for the hand of a golden-haired maiden. Golden-haired maiden, be true to him, be true! Cheerily, cheerily, bridegroom, today! The storm-wind howls wedding-music, the ocean dances to the tune.—Hui! Hark! His whistle sounds. Captain, are you back again?—Hui! Hoist the sail! Your bride, say, where is she?—Hui! Off, to sea! Captain, captain, you have no luck in love! Ha, ha, ha! Blow, storm-wind, howl away! No damage can you do to our sails! Satan has charmed them, they will not rend in all eternity!"

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

The Norwegian sailors, suspending their own clamour, have looked and listened in an increasing wonder, which gradually turns to horror. To overcome the superstitious fear they frankly own to, they start singing together with all their might, to drown their terror as well as the voices of the rival singers. The two sharply contrasting sea-songs strive one against the other for a few moments, then the Norwegians, giving up the contention, retire from deck to the last man, tremulously making the sign of the cross. As they disappear below, the Dutchmen break into a fearful yell of derision,—and instantly darkness and complete silence reinvade the ship, while perfect calm falls upon the sea. For a long interval the scene so crowded and noisy a moment before, remains empty and still.

Senta comes hurriedly from the house, followed by Erik, both in great agitation. He has learned of her betrothal to the stranger. "What have I heard?" he cries in incredulous anguish; "O God, what have I seen? Is it a delusion? Can it be truth? Can it be fact?"—"Ask not, Erik," she falters, in anguish, too; "I must not answer."—"Just God! There can be no doubt of it. It is truth! What unholy power swept you along? What force so quickly prevailed with you to make you break this devoted heart? Was it your father? Ha, he brought the bridegroom home with him. I recognised him. I forboded what is coming to pass. But you? Is it possible? You give your hand to the man who has hardly more than crossed your doorstep?"—"Oh, say no more!" pleads the girl, torn by the sight of his sorrow, and her necessity to refuse the only possible comfort, "Be silent! I must! I must! . . ."—"Oh, that docility, blind as your act!" he raves; "You were glad, at a beck from your father, to follow. With a blow you crush the life out of my heart!"—"No more! No more!" she

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

tries to stop him; "I must not see you again, must not think of you. High duty commands it!"—"What high duty? Is it not a higher duty still to observe that which you once swore to me,—eternal constancy?"—"What? . . ." she cries, in utmost dismay; "You say that I swore eternal constancy to you?"—"Oh, Senta," he goes on, subdued by her shocked amazement, sorrowfully to explain the simple rhetoric of his misstatement, "will you deny it? Do you refuse to remember that day when you called me to you in the valley? When in order to gather the upland flowers for you I endured dangers and labours innumerable? Do you remember how from the steep rocks on the shore we watched your father departing? He sailed upon the white-winged ship, and confided you to my care. When your arm encircled my neck, did you not own once more your love for me? That which thrilled me at the pressure of your hand, tell me, was it not the assurance of your constancy?"

Unseen of the two, for the moment so absorbed in each other, the Hollander has come from the house. He has been standing near enough to overhear Erik's last sentences; the significance of these seems scarcely ambiguous, his inference is natural. It is a lovers' meeting which he has chanced upon. Whatever her reasons for accepting him, the Hollander,—it is clear that this young huntsman has a claim on the girl who declared so glibly that the law of truth was written in her soul.

The two are interrupted by a wail. "Lost! Oh, lost! To all eternity lost!" They turn and start in horror at sight of the Hollander. "Farewell, Senta," he cries, and with the precipitation of despair is making straight for the boundless deep. Senta throws herself across his path. "Stay, O unfortunate!" But the Hollander pushes past. "To sea! To sea! To sea until the end of time!—It is at an end with your truth! At an

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

end with your truth and my salvation! Farewell, I would not bring about your ruin!" Erik, catching sight of his face, the face of a lost soul, shudders at the measureless woe in his eyes. "Stay," Senta implores, "stay, you shall never depart!" Disregarding her, the Hollander blows a shrill note on his whistle and shouts to his crew: "Hoist sail! Lift anchor! For ever and ever bid farewell to the land!"

There is struggle for a long moment among the three: hers to prevent the Hollander; Erik's to keep back her, caught, as he believes, in the claws of Satan; the Hollander's to leave. Since her faith is turned to mockery, he, forced to doubt her, has fallen to doubting God himself. There is no faith more on earth. Away, then, forever away! "Learn the fate from which I save you!" he finally turns to her, as if softened by her pleading to the point of wishing her to know that he leaves not in hate and anger, but very pity for her feminine frailty; and he states plainly the threatening fate of which we heard him give but a warning before. "Condemned am I to the most dreadful of dooms. Tenfold death would be to me yearned-for bliss. A woman alone can deliver me, a woman who shall keep her faith to me even until death. You, it is true, had sworn truth to me, but not as yet before the Almighty, and that it is which saves you. For know, unhappy woman, the fate which overtakes her who breaks her vow of eternal constancy to me: Everlasting damnation is her portion. Innumerable have been the victims already, through me, of that dread sentence. But you—you shall be saved. Farewell, then, and farewell, to all time, salvation!" Again he turns shoreward. "Indeed, indeed, I know you," Senta follows still; "Full well I know your fate. From the first moment of seeing you I knew you. The end is at hand of your torture! I am she through whose fidelity you shall find salvation!"

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

Erik, in terror for Senta, has called wildly toward the house, toward the ship, for help to save her. Daland, Mary, and the young girls have come hurrying from the house, the Norwegian sailors from the ship. "No, no, you know me not!" the Hollander is saying; "No suspicion have you who I am! Inquire of the seas of every zone, inquire of the seaman overscoring the main--Behold"—he points at the ship whose blood-red sails are set and whose ghastly crew show uncannily active in preparations for departure; "Behold and recognise this ship, terror of every pious soul. . . . The Flying Dutchman I am called!"

With lightning rapidity he has gone aboard. Instantly the weird ship is under way and amid the cavernous Yohohoes of its seamen making for the open sea.

Senta struggles to follow. Her father, Erik, her nurse, all forcibly hold her back. But she is suddenly stronger than them all. She tears herself free and rushing from them climbs a rock projecting into the deep water. With all her strength she calls after the departing Hollander, "Praise be to your angel and his decree! Here am I, faithful to you until death!" and springs into the sea.

Upon the instant, the red-sailed ship, with all its crew, sinks. A great wave heaves high and falls again eddying, burying the whole. Above the drifting wreckage, in the rosy light, fore-shine of sunrise, are seen the transfigured and glorified forms of Senta and the Hollander rising from the sea, clasped in each others' arms, and floating heavenward.

We are always touched in this old world of daily wickedness and pettiness to come upon stories which seem statements of a popular ineradicable assurance that love has power to save. It is perhaps oftenest the love of a woman, clinging pertina-

THE WAGNERIAN ROMANCES

ciously to her affection; but there are legends, too, of men,—who do not save, however, that we remember, by long fidelity, but by ardour rather in overcoming obstacles. They kiss the fair enchanted one in the form of a hideous dragon and she is restored to beauty. One sees the simple philosophy of such folk-tales. The evil doom is usually the punishment for sin. The one who loves the person so doomed is innocent. If then she makes the fate of the sufferer her own, she suffers unjust punishment, and God, who inclines to mercy, must sooner pardon the sinner for her sake than condemn the innocent.

